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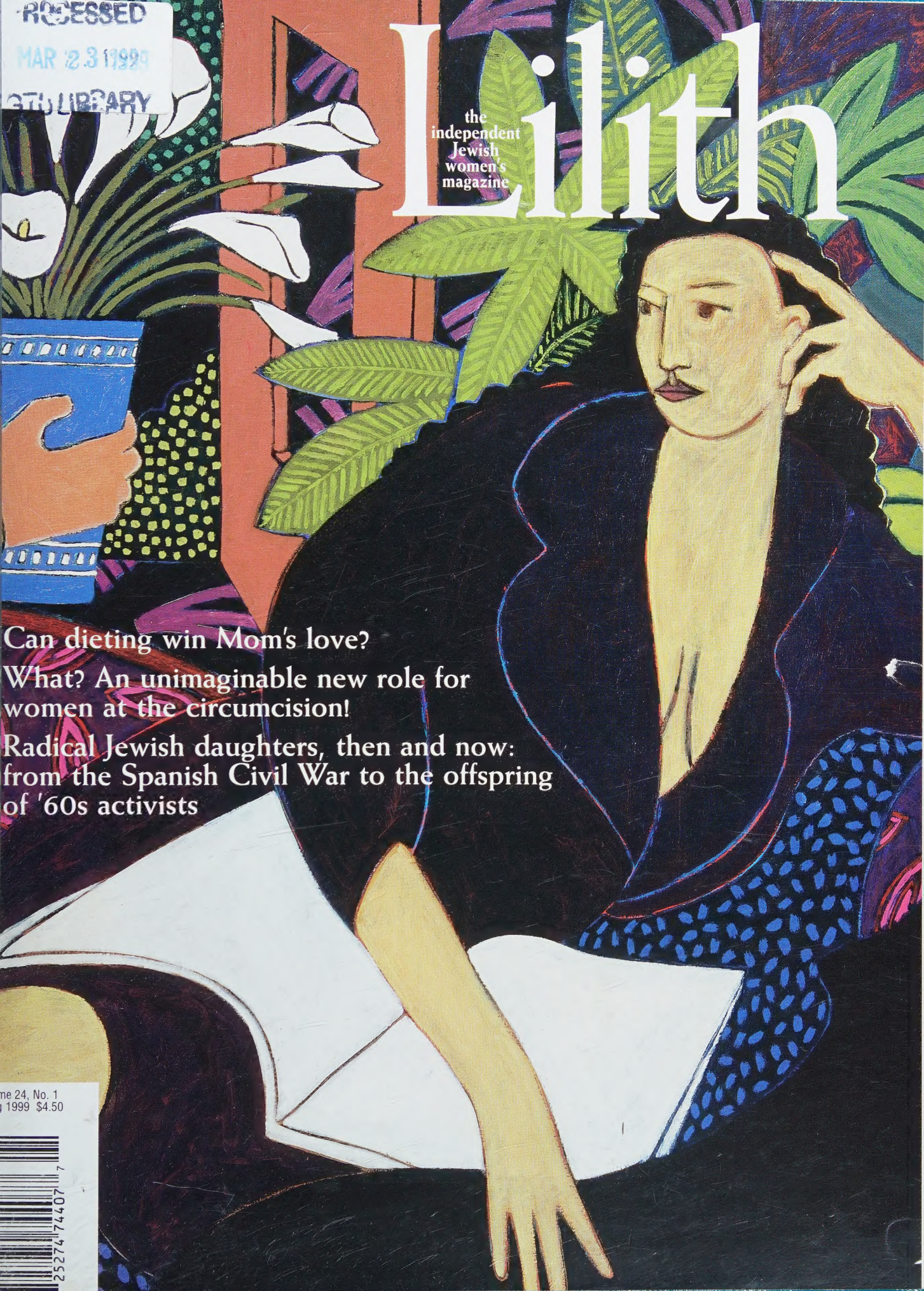

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Lilith

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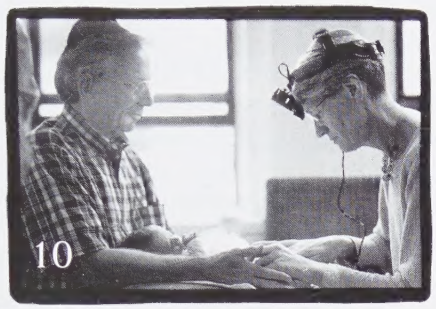

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Cover: "Her Mother Loved Fresh Flowers" (detail) by Lynne Feldman, a painter, illustrator and printmaker living in Rochester, NY. To see more of her work call (716) 473-2240 or check www.lynnefeldman.com

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from the editor

As we shape each issue of LILITH, there's always a moment, as we sit at the library table in the office, surrounded by manuscripts (a strange word to describe computer printouts of articles, I suppose), when we worry about the "voices" speaking out from these pages. Too many first-person articles? A broad enough age range? Illustrations and headlines that will entice our readers (you!) into each story?

I have to tell you that for the issue you have in your hands, the process felt smoother than usual. I love the art, the photos, and the text. We retrieve unknown Jewish women from the history of the Spanish Civil War, explore the widespread (and utterly new) acceptance of women *mohels*, and glimpse what life for Jewish women was like under totalitarian regimes in Latin America.

Several very different pieces here are told from the same perspective—the daughter's. We hear from the daughter of a silent father (she moves half a world away from him before they reconcile); the daughter of a Holocaust survivor who cherishes her mother's unusual story; an ambivalent daughter, brought up in the maelstrom of her parents' political activism in the 1960s; and a grown-up Londoner still

We were all daughters once...

treated like a youngster because she's unattached to a male. We didn't plan to feature daughters' voices in this way, but the stories invited themselves together into this issue, as sometimes happens. Please let us know if they trigger "daughter" memories for you.

And now for a moment of gratitude. The names that appear at right are those of women and men without whose support the magazine you're reading could not exist. Read through the list. If you know people on it, please thank them when you see them. If your name is there, please know how much your generosity is appreciated by LILITH's readers.

If you would like to have the pleasure of adding your name, or that of your foundation, to the list of our supporters for next time, it's simple. Just send your tax-deductible contribution to LILITH at 250 West 57th Street, New York, NY 10107. If you prefer to contribute via credit card, you can fax details to (212) 757-5705, or e-mail us at lilithmag@aol.com.

Many thanks.

Susan Weidman Schneider

Lilith

In the Garden of Eden, long before the eating of the apple... The Holy One created the first human beings—a man, Adam, and a woman, Lilith. Lilith said, "We are equal because we are created from the same earth."
(from The Alphabet of Ben Sira, 23a-b)

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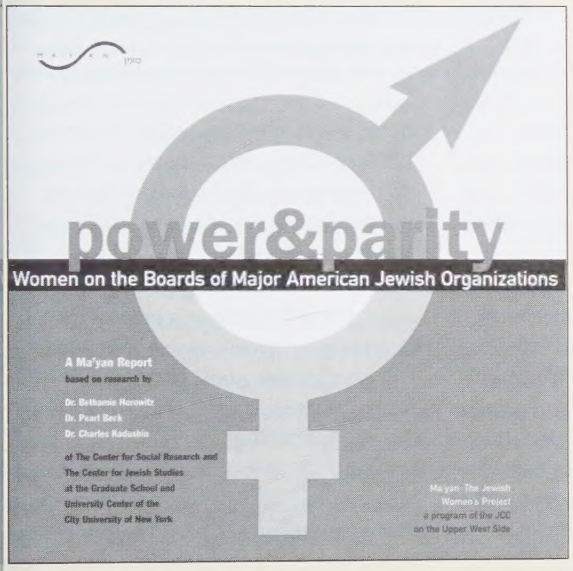
"The Voices of Women." Traditionally, the voice of the Jewish woman was not to be heard in public, lest it arouse men. No more. These pages are for news about Jewish women, in our own strong voices.

Bringing Women on Board. Here's How.

Jewish women are entering the upper echelons of management in business and banking, medicine and law, arts and government, but we are not yet appropriately represented in the Jewish community. Some corporations offer large bonuses in order to recruit women into management positions, but the Jewish community offers accomplished women little recognition. Major national Jewish organizations (except for women's organizations) have rarely had a woman as chief executive. And women are similarly underrepresented in volunteer positions. One especially horrifying finding from a recent survey of volunteer boards of Jewish organizations: full-time employed women, the fastest-growing segment of Jewish women, are the women least likely to be recruited to leadership positions in the Jewish community.


power&parity
Women on the Boards of Major American Jewish Organizations
A Ma'yan Report
based on research by
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Dr. Pearl Beck
Dr. Charles Kadushin
of The Center for Social Research and The Center for Jewish Studies at the Graduate School and University Center of the City University of New York
Ma'yan: The Jewish Women's Project
a program of the JCC on the Upper West Side

Why does gender representation matter? Because important decisions about policies and programs at everything from child-care agencies to Jewish community centers, from synagogue ritual committees (should women have equal rites?) to Hebrew schools (should girls have equal rites?) get made in these executive suites.

"Power and Parity: Women on the Boards of Major American Jewish Organizations," the 1998 study conducted by Ma'yan, the Jewish Women's Project [see LILITH, Spring 1998], found that only 25% of the board members were female, and half the boards have fewer than 25% female membership.

One outdated explanation has been to blame women for this imbalance. Only last month the Task Force on Women at New York UJA-Federation heard the proposal, "Maybe we should offer women skill-building workshops." To say that it's the women who need the help, and not recognize the chauvinism of the men overlooking them, is ludicrous, considering the sheer talent of Jewish women in so many fields.

Better news is that, armed with statistics from Ma'yan's survey and others, some enlightened Jewish organizations are actually now seeking women as board members and candidates for executive slots. LILITH is uniquely poised to help them do so. LILITH's National Jewish Women's Talent Bank, up and running since 1994, has more than 400 experts in various fields in our database. Now, LILITH is launching a new initiative at the Talent Bank. In addition to maintaining our extensive resource files on women experts in a variety of fields, LILITH will begin to keep track of women interested in serving on the boards, or as executives of Jewish organizations—local, regional or national.

The Jewish Women's Talent Bank, started with seed money from the Nathan Cummings Foundation, is now looking for ongoing support from organizations and foundations. Under the direction of Naomi Danis, the Talent Bank has made all sorts of custom matches for organizations or individuals—a university looking for an engaging woman scholar to give a named lecture, a reporter looking for an female expert to quote in a breaking story, a bride looking for a *ketubah* artist and a woman rabbi. The Talent Bank is not an employment agency, a speakers bureau, or a list. It is a LILITH program that offers creative consultations and suggestions.

There is nothing else like The Jewish Women's Talent Bank, and we invite you to participate:

- **Request a Talent Bank form**, fill it out and submit your own resume and other materials for our files. Call 1-888-2-LILITH, or e-mail lilithmag@aol.com. You can also print out a Talent Bank form from our web site at www.lilithmag.com

- **Ask LILITH to help your organization** or agency locate women who might be appropriate board members or executives (as many of you have done already). Contact us: LILITH, 250 West 57 Street NYC 10107, (212) 757-0818. Fax: (212) 757-5705. E-mail: lilithmag@aol.com

- **Make a tax-deductible contribution to the Talent Bank at LILITH** and be part of this unique project, doing the work we all believe in. You can contribute by check or by credit card to any of the addresses above.

When reports about gender discrimination in the Jewish community were presented last season to a women's meeting, Jacqueline Levine, veteran activist, rolled her eyes. And for good reason. A survey claiming "notable gains" for women in breaking through the glass ceiling also revealed that more women are permitted to rise in volunteer roles in smaller Jewish communities than in large cities, that no women is yet the C.E.O. of a Jewish federation in a large city, and that women are seriously underrepresented as board members. These were findings almost identical to statistics Levine herself had reported—*in 1972!!!!*

Two decades from now, thanks to the efforts of Jackie Levine, Ma'yan, LILITH, and scores of energized women (plus some enlightened men, of course), we trust that we won't still be rolling our eyes.

—Susan Weidman Schneider

The Opportunity of Art

Rosen tutors Dorin in ceremonial pottery-making. Below, a "blessing shield" honors cancer survivors.

What is the Jewish theology of art? It is a fusion of Judaism, art and spirituality, and New Mexico artist Lia Lynn Rosen thinks that its time is long overdue.

For Rosen, art is a form of prayer. "The rabbinic/biblical interpretation of art as related to idolatry is really off the mark in our day," she says. "We *honor* God with the work of our hands—just like the creative expression of writing, but using a different medium."

Judaism, she explains, has not traditionally made a place for artwork that is more spiritual than decorative. Because there's a vacuum here, Rosen believes, the visual arts are an ideal mechanism for women who want to explore—and comment on—Judaism. Making Judaism hospitable to women, she says, "requires developing forms and venues that have not existed before." Unlike what she calls the canon's "very male texts," Jewish *art* is untainted by the bias of gender.

Rosen, whose Jewish ceremonial pottery with a feminist flavor can be found in past issues of LILITH, has put her own work on the back burner in order to educate the Jewish and arts communities on the richness that the artistic conjunction of Judaism and feminism offers. She recently left Albuquerque to enroll in an M.A. program in Art and Art Education at Columbia Teachers College, where she creates workshops on "Jewish visual literacy" using examples of the flourishing of Jewish arts in her native New Mexico. Education, explains Rosen, is key: "You can make the most beautiful thing in the world, but if people don't have a context, or a way to understand it. ..."

Rosen has exhibited in New Mexico and across the country, and fuses traditional Jewish elements with a modern and feminist sensibility, creating pieces that are intended to be used in home ritual. "I see my work as *tikkun* [repair] on Judaism," she explains. "It's an attempt to make Judaism more whole." In one of Rosen's "Blessing Shields," created to honor women who have survived breast cancer, is found the Hebrew word "Shaddai," one of the names of God that may also mean "my breasts." From the rim of the shields hang four *tzitzit,* fringes, intended to remind women of the Covenant that they may reclaim in many different ways.

Rosen's educational focus received national attention recently when she became the first Jewish folk artist to receive a National Endowment for the Arts-funded grant from New Mexico Arts, a state arts agency. In an unusual move, the funding was given to Rosen to support her mentoring of a 13-year-old apprentice, Rachel Dorin. For six months, Rosen passed down to Dorin, whose mother is Japanese and father is Jewish, the female tradition of making pottery by helping Dorin create Jewish ceremonial objects. "Being exposed to Judaism through another woman," Rosen believes, "made it more accessible and less strange to her."

—Lili Kalish

For more information on workshops or lecture engagements, contact: Lia Lynn Rosen, Yetzirah Pottery, 1230 Amsterdam Ave., #911, New York, NY 10027; 212-870-8922; e-mail:llr22@columbia.edu

Jewish Woman Leads Switzerland

Ruth Dreifuss has been selected by the Swiss parliament to be the president of Switzerland—the first woman and the first Jew to hold that post. Dreifuss, 58, was inaugurated January 1 for the year-long post. Surprisingly, women did not even achieve the right to vote in Switzerland until 1971.

"My professional commitment is leftist, feminist and dedicated to human rights," Dreifuss told the Jewish Telegraphic Agency, adding that her country's actions during World War II would also be on her agenda.

Dreifuss noted to the JTA that she has kept a low profile on the issue because she did not want to speak out as the "token Jew" in the government. But she plans to reopen dialogue with Jewish groups over Holocaust-era issues. "It would be a catastrophe," she said, if the $1.25 billion Swiss banks' settlement with Jewish groups "mean[t] we would consider our work over." ■

Americans Meet Yemenite Child Brides

Elisheva Stamper watched a group of giggling teenage girls pop balloons and play musical chairs. The woman sitting beside her at the party pointed out one girl who looked about 10 years old. "She's 13 and married," said the director of the absorption center for new immigrants. "Most of the other girls older than 12 are also married, and many of them have at least one child, if not two or three."

The teenagers were Yemenite Jews in an absorption center near Jerusalem. They had been in Israel between four months and two years and would stay at the center until they were ready to enter the mainstream of Israeli society. Stamper had just arrived for two months with Otzma, a project bringing post-college Americans to volunteer in Israel.

"I was shocked," said Stamper. "Coming from my background, it felt like rape to think of these girls in sexual relationships with men."

The Yemenite Jews had arrived in Israel on Magic Carpet II, a secret operation carried out by the Joint Distribution Committee in partnership with the Jewish Agency and funded by the Combined Jewish Philanthropies. Since 1992, some 300 Yemenite Jews have joined the 46,000 others who arrived in Israel in 1949 and 1950. They are religiously observant, and continue their traditions from Arab-dominated Yemen.

"As we grew to know each other, I learned that the girls were betrothed without their involvement," said Stamper. "The men paid the girls' fathers a dowry, usually of necklaces or beads. The girls had no choice in the matter at all."

Some of the girl-brides were clearly unhappy in their relationships. One 17-year-old told Stamper she was scared, and didn't like the man she was to marry. Another young woman, whose first child was more than a year old, refused to go to the *mikveh,* the ritual bath. Jewish law prohibits physical contact between husband and wife until the new mother goes to the *mikveh.* By refusing to go, this woman prevented her husband, whom she feared, from having sex with her.

Among the Yemenite Jews in Israel, major conflicts about the roles of men and women are brewing. In Yemen, women were not allowed to read or have books, and their roles in the home were clearly defined. In Israel, however, women are learning Hebrew and job skills, while many men study in the *yeshiva.* This changing dynamic is causing tensions. In particular, problems arise in the case of multiple wives, who often don't get along in their new, Israeli environment. "If a 40-year-old man wanted a new wife, he didn't take a 35-year-old woman," Stamper reports. "He took a 14- or 15-year-old. The new wife is usually his favorite." To get back at her husband's new wife, one woman would turn off all the lights in her home just before Shabbat, thus keeping the new wife in the dark for 24 hours.

Yet some of the girl-brides are content. One girl, whose father insisted she marry before they left Yemen, had been 12—and terrified. A year later, she seemed happy with her 17-year-old husband. "It seemed as though with time, the women often grew to love their husbands," Stamper said.

While the American volunteers helped these women adjust to Israeli society, they were reluctant to judge the culture they were encountering. "We were supposed to teach them about matching clothes, but we didn't want to take the Yemenite out of them," said Stamper. "They wore lively-colored clothing that was beautiful. It wasn't normal for Israel, but it fit their culture." Instead the Americans put on Yemenite clothes and showed the Yemenites theirs. The Yemenite teens taught the volunteers to make pita; the Americans demonstrated pancake-making.

"They saw us as Jews from another planet, yet for the most part they were very tolerant and accepted our differences," said Stamper. "We wore pants, didn't cover our hair, and were lighter-skinned, and the fact that we weren't married was just one more difference, both as Jews and as women."

Stamper, at left, with Gamila and baby Noga.

One meaningful moment occurred when the Americans invited the Yemenite girls to a *Havdalah* service. "It was very special. They saw us doing a Jewish ritual that they could recognize. It helped them to see us as Jews."

—Katy Z. Allen

Nose Is a Nose Is a Nose?

"In the midst of an explosion in cosmetic surgery, the number of nose jobs has dropped significantly," The New York Times reported in January. The 8% decline between 1992 and 1996, experts say, is due largely to a new Jewish comfort with—even affection for—the classic Jewish nose.

"The heyday for nose jobs," the Times reports, "was in the 60's and early 70's," when Jewish parents who had witnessed the Holocaust wanted to protect their children from persecution. "To them, that meant fitting inconspicuously to the Protestant mainstream."

"Every girl on Long Island had a Diamond nose," said—who else?—rhinoplasty expert Howard Diamond. Said another veteran operator, "Everybody wanted to look like a *shiksa.*" These days, some women are actually asking to have the bumps restored to their "little ski-jump" noses, now that ethnic is beautiful. ■

Against Violence Against Women

AMY STONE

International Day Against Violence Against Women. The Hebrew message on the placard at right reads: "Don't call me sweetie."

The mood was spirited, inclusive, as marchers mingled with after-work shoppers in the narrow Jerusalem streets surrounding Mahaneh Yehudah market. For the second year, Israeli women — and men—were marching to protest violence against women as part of the Nov. 25 International Day Against Violence Against Women.

The crowd was larger than last year, comprising many 20-something sabras, a sprinkling of Orthodox women, and American-born Israelis—politicized in the Gloria Steinem era—now marching with their daughters. A shopkeeper stationed himself outside his store, drumming on a basket in counterpoint to the Hebrew and English chants: "What part of 'no' don't you understand?!" and "Increase the punishment for rapists and wife beaters!"

"There's been a lot of awareness in the last year," one woman said about the larger turn-out. "It seemed like an epidemic—every week there was some news story of a woman's murder. There's the sense that violence is increasing in Israel since the murder of Rabin."

Organizing groups includ-ed Kol Ha-Isha, established by women in the Israeli peace movement to promote a feminist model of social change; the MiLev Center for Crisis Counseling; the Tel Aviv Rape Crisis Center; and Mevo Satum, a volunteer group fighting the plight of *agunot* (chained) women unable to obtain a Jewish divorce. A full-page newspaper ad from the Jerusalem Social Welfare Division announced the protest and listed services for victims of family violence.

One American-born woman, in Israel for the past nine years, said, "You can feel it in the air that things are changing. Even in the Orthodox community, women aren't embarrassed to ask for help. As more Orthodox women are becoming more educated, more vocal, they're coming out and saying, 'My husband is beating me. He's beating the children.' They have to be very brave."

—Amy Stone

Try This: A Health Library in the Mikveh . . .

The Women's Tefila of Great Neck Synagogue and the Mikveh Association of the North Shore on Long Island recently opened a library, focused on women's health concerns, in the waiting room of the local *mikveh.* To our knowledge, this is the first coordinated effort by a women's prayer group and a *mikveh* association. From a recent perusal of what little is left on the shelves, the library is an immense success.

The idea of a lending library focusing on women's health was born in response to a request by a local Orthodox rabbi for help combatting domestic violence in the Jewish community. The Women's Tefila Group developed the purchasing list for the library and donated the funds, and the Mikveh Association donated the facility.

In the relative privacy of the *mikveh* waiting room, women can browse or borrow the books anonymously. The library covers a wide range of topics, including physical and reproductive health, marital and family health, domestic violence, and spiritual health and *taharat hamishpacha* (Jewish family laws). The books come from both Jewish and secular worlds. The collection runs the gamut from Dr. Susan Love's *Breast Book* to Blu Greenberg's *How to Run a Traditional Jewish Household,* from *And Hannah Wept ...*(by Michael Gold, on infertility), to *The Courage to Heal: A Guide for Women Survivors of Child Sexual Abuse* (by Ellen Bass & Laura Davis).

On the topic of domestic violence, secular books such as *The Verbally Abusive Relationship* (by Patricia Evans) share shelf space with books written for observant Jews, including Rabbi Abraham Twersky's, *The Shame Borne of Silence: Spouse Abuse in the Jewish Community,* and Miriam Adahan's *Sticks and Stones.*

While all of these books are available in local bookstores, the great number being borrowed suggests that many women are interested in reading books that they may not be willing to purchase or order in a public library or bookstore. Shame, anxiety and financial constraints become obstacles to getting help. The *mikveh* library offers women a way to overcome those obstacles.

—Nechama Liss-Levinson

letters

Lilith welcomes letters to the editor, articles, fiction, poetry and memoirs. We reserve the right to edit letters for syntax and length.

Woman: 'A Constant Giver'

I can't get over the wasted energy that went into the article "Sexing the Answering Machine" [Spring 1997]. Many forms of languages are separated into male and female words. Why do you feel offended by this? I would expect you, as a "Jewish" organization, to know that Hebrew above all other languages has a holy background and has reasons for making certain words male or female. You seem to be looking for problems to cry about. As for

"Sexing the Answering Machine"

all service-providing words being feminine, why don't you appreciate that a woman has the "power" of giving and that, like Hashem, she is a constant giver?

Chaim Elimelech, via e-mail

Big Mouths

I am writing in response to Bonnie P. Theiner's praise of former Pittsburgh mayor Sophie Masloff ["Big Mouths," Fall 1998]. Theiner is correct that Masloff was Pittsburgh's first female and first Jewish mayor. Theiner neglected to mention the fact that Mayor Masloff made national headlines by going all the way to the Supreme Court to fight to keep a nativity scene on the steps of the Pittsburgh City County Building. Mayor Masloff lost the fight (the Supreme Court citing separation of church and state), but was allowed to keep the Hanukkah menorah on the steps of the building. The reason? A menorah is "secular," of course.

The campaign that upset me the most was Masloff's campaign to clean up the city. To try and get Pittsburghers behind the campaign, Ms. Masloff needed a catchy slogan. So what did she have painted on all the public garbage cans? "It's Sophie's Choice — Keep Pittsburgh Clean."

I cannot think of a more distasteful thing to come from the mouth of a "proud, Jewish woman" than to take the story of the torment of a Jewish woman in the Holocaust and to cheerfully equate that tragedy with garbage.

Hope Anne Nathan
Pittsburgh, PA

Miriam Siegel lives at the Jewish Home and Hospital for the Aged where I have been a volunteer for 12 years. Miriam not only speaks her mind (or as LILITH named it, her "big mouth"), she is also a *tzadeket* (righteous woman). As her "adopted granddaughter," I have benefited immensely from her *hesed* (lovingkindness) and her commitment to the Jewish value of teaching *l'dor v'dor* (generation to generation).

Miriam dresses in a suit, pearls and lipstick every single day of the year. I wear a suit, pearls and lipstick every day because of her. She has taught me how to light Shabbat candles and experience the holidays.

The picture of a perfect lady, Miriam has been to jail, arrested for marching in support of the suffragette movement. Her father bailed her out but could not dissuade her from continuing marching.

Diane Kaston
New York, NY

Right-Wing Women

As a progressive Jew, I am reluctant to comment on an intra-Orthodox conflict, but as a long-time feminist, I must note that we do not entirely lack common ground with these "anti-feminists" ["Right-Wing Women: Keeping Orthodoxy Safe from Feminists?" Winter 1998]. When they claim the right to interpret the texts, when they note that it is still us and not our husbands who worry about whether there is toilet paper in the pantry, when they point out that the women's movement did a disservice in failing to tell us the price of attempting to "have it all," they are not as alien to us as they (and we) might think. My faith in education may be blind, but I cannot but believe that their learning will bring many of them ever closer to appreciating the heroines they now demonize, such as Blu Greenberg and BatSheva Marcus. I, for one, welcome them into the struggle.

Kathleen Peratis
New York, NY

Please!! No one has to tell a magazine that devoted an issue to names that names and words are important. I appreciate the care that went into the decision to use "right-wing" rather than "Torah" Judaism and request that LILITH extend that same care into future editorial policy.

For those of us who do not believe that *smikha* (rabbinic ordination) rubs off in the marital bed, please refrain from using the honorific *"rebbetzin"* [for a rabbi's wife]. (And please don't use the Israeli version *"rabbanit"* either.) While many women's identities may be fully invested in their mate's professions, that doesn't mean LILITH should grant that extra halo of authority that is explicitly extended to a rabbi's wife by using the term. The imbalance in perceived authority merely adds to the potential for incendiary rhetoric.

Jonina Duker
North Bethesda, MD

Abusive Rabbis

Many people, and many women, remain passionately loyal to Rabbi Shlomo Carlebach because they say he filled a deep spiritual longing ["Shlomo Carlebach's Shadow Side," Spring 1998]. When someone gives you something you need, it is difficult to look at the whole of who they are. This is a dynamic of incest. It is tragically ironic that many women experienced Carlebach as healing while he wounded other women and children. Some women felt both cared for and betrayed. This is what makes rabbinical abuse so devastating.

Amanda Stone
Capitola, CA

As a survivor of sexual assault I want to thank you for the unprecedented step of publishing Sarah Blustain's article on Shlomo Carlebach. I, too, was sexually assaulted by a rabbi. In the years since, I have withdrawn from a judgmental Jewish community.

I spoke out twice; once, after three years' silence, to the synagogue where this man served as a rabbi, and again five years later to his national rabbinic association in support of another survivor's complaint against him. I know why most survivors remain silent. Re-victimization at the hands of individuals who are poorly qualified to determine the credibility of testimony of a sexual assault complaint and

who are biased by their relationship to the accused only compounds the effects of the assault.

Megan Marx
Denver, CO

Speaking as a survivor of repeated sexual molestation, I can attest to the fact that confronting one's abuser can be nearly as harmful as the abuse itself when the response is inadequate. In my own case, despite several confrontations with my perpetrator and his family, it has only been since his death that I have been able to fully put the issue to rest. Why? Because only since his death have I felt assured that he is no longer able to harm anyone else, and protecting others is quite often the main reason that survivors confront their attackers.

So, please, while Carlebach's good deeds may have been many and should not be denied, let us look at him as a complete person. And, more importantly, let us not criticize the victims of abuse who are trying to face their experience and find true healing.

Hilary S. Liber
Carlsbad, CA

The Power of Gold

The Swiss finally admit that they "owe" survivors and their families gold and money transferred to or hoarded by Swiss banks during the Holocaust. Who knows? The survivors may even live long enough to get what is coming to them.

I am a survivor of the Holocaust. Even though more than 50 years have passed since my miraculous survival, even though I try to pretend that I have healed, it is not so.

Now, as I am bombarded with news of the Swiss gold, I think of my own experiences. My late father, who went to a concentration camp in his 40s, was always proud of his beautiful teeth. When he miraculously returned two years later, following the liberation, we noticed he had artificial teeth. Finally, our mother asked him about them. He told us that one of the Kapos had noticed some gold crowns at the back of his mouth and struck his face so long that he spat out most of his teeth, including the crowns. He also told us may other horror stories.

As an adult, I have always liked, and still do like, objects made of gold. I never thought about the origins of these objects; they were simply jewelry. Now I know, from reading about the Swiss gold, that Jewish gold—including my poor father's crowns—found its way to different places. I do not believe I will buy gold again.

Irene Frisch
Teaneck, NJ

So Many Liliths, So Little Time

I am pleased that Sarah Blustain included our new anthology *Which Lilith?* in "Lilith Gets an Image-Lift" [Winter 1998]. However, she seems concerned by the fact that the recent Lilith Fair received more space than Lilith Magazine did. *Which Lilith?* is essentially a book of contemporary Jewish women's *midrash* on the enigmatic figure of Lilith. The other editors, Lily Rivlin and Henny Wenkart, and I did feel it was important to include an afterword, listing examples of Lilith's appearance in popular culture; the musical event and the magazine (which I respect and admire greatly) were part of this summary-piece. A fuller treatment of both, though merited, is beyond the scope of our book.

Enid Dame
Brooklyn, NY

Rights for Women

Congratulations on your Winter 1998 tribute to Israeli women's contribution in shaping Israeli society during the past 50 years. As you point out in your article, "Israel at 51 and Beyond," women's accomplishments, although significant, have not received appropriate media attention in the jubilee celebrations. Delighted to be included in your list of some of the women who are making a difference, I must clarify one point. The International Jewish Women's Human Rights Watch, of which I am the director, is a new project whose goal is to restore justice, fairness and equality to Jewish marriage and divorce. As an observant woman, I and most of the project's supporters believe that human rights concepts of justice and equality for women in marriage, divorce and founding of a family are consistent with Jewish values. We can quote endless classical sources as well as modern rabbinical writings in support of our position that Jewish law was not meant to be used by vindictive, greedy and abusive husbands to exert control over their wives by denying them a religious divorce (*get*). The existence of thousands of *agunot* (chained women) in Jewish communities world wide is not only a denial of Jewish women's human rights in marriage and divorce. It is also a violation of Jewish law.

Therefore, I request that the phrase "A new approach applies human rights concepts rather than religious law" in the section of the article under my name be changed to read, "A new approach applies human rights concepts to *get* injustice."

Sharon Shenhav
Jerusalem, Israel

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כתב עת פמיניסטי

FROM NOGA, ISRAEL'S FEMINIST MAGAZINE

This page is the first in a series that highlights Noga, Israel's Hebrew-language feminist journal, which has been publishing for 20 years and is edited by Rachel Ostrowitz, Mira Ariel, Rachel Giora, Erela Daor, and Miri Krasin and funded by U.S./Israel Women-to-Women. LILITH believes it's important to hear about Israeli women's take on things directly from their own feminist publication. From Noga's Summer '98 issue, prepared and translated by **Naomi Danis**.

RUTO

"THE CONCRETE CEILING; WOMEN IN ISRAELI POLITICS"

by **Sylvia Bijawi** cites the third Knesset, elected in 1955, as the zenith for women's participation, with 12 female Members. This 10% has yet to be matched or exceeded.

Women constitute 45% of the employment sector; more than 50% of students receiving BA's; more than 45% receiving MA's and more than 33% receiving Ph.D.s. These phenomenon have led to increased political activity—but why not to more appreciable accomplishments?

The obstacles are many: Some entire political parties (Agudat Yisrael, Degel HaTorah, and Shas), though supported by public funds, won't allow women to run on their lists. Women's organizing is often considered "volunteerism," not "political action." Female politicians are called "isolationists" or accused of "sectorizing" when they organize across ethnic, national, or religious lines when they could as easily be labeled "pluralistic" or "multicultural." Why are women's issues thought of as less important than peace, security or the national consensus? Bijawi asks.

An example of silencing occurred during the general strike in 1997. An obedient and disciplined silence was the response to a threat to dismantle the *Tipot Halav* mother-child health clinics, an extraordinary preventive health institution any modern egalitarian nation would be proud of.

What do we need 50 years after the founding of the state? Writes Bijawi: Stop talking about women as victims. Then, broaden the crack in the concrete ceiling by forming a coalition of women's organizations as one political entity that must be reckoned with. They would formulate "the Ten Commandments" of equal citizenship for women in Israel. But that, suggests the author, is a topic for another discussion.

TAMI ELYADA

"IS MARRIAGE A PREREQUISITE FOR WOMANHOOD?

On Single Women in the Palestinian Community in Jaffa," by **Amalia Saar**, explicates the status of women who are referred to as *banat* (those who remain girls), signifying—at least officially—that marrying is what makes a girl into a woman. The author explores the reality that some unmarried women are successful in achieving social maturity in the eyes of this community in other ways, including academic and work achievement.

Subscriptions to Noga are $38 for four issues airmail; $30 surface mail; in Israel 100 NIS. Noga, P.O.B. 21376, 61213, Tel Aviv, ISRAEL. noga_mag@shani.net

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NOGA INVESTIGATES by Merav Cohen

"Feminist? Me? But after all, I shave!"

WOMEN IN IRAN: SINCE KHATAMI

Erela Daor writes on the lives of women since the May 1997 election of Muhammad Khatami as president of Iran. (He was elected with a mandate for liberalization by an overwhelming 69% of votes cast, with 94% of eligible individuals voting.)

The improvement has not been consistent. On the one hand, Khatami appointed Massuma Aviktar as vice president for administration and the environment, and two women as vice ministers. Women have been appointed judges. They have *not* lost their right to vote. On the other hand, over the president's objection, a law was passed that is expected to have severe repercussions for the quality of health care for women: it obligates hospitals to have entirely separate facilities for female and male patients.

FIRST FEMINIST HEBREW POET

Two poems are reprinted by **Rachel Morfurgo** (1790-1871), who was the first modern female (and feminist) Hebrew poet and lived in Trieste, Italy. She wrote when she couldn't sleep at night, or when she finished her chores caring for her husband and four children. Many of her poems were written for occasions, some have an angry edge. She didn't have Virginia Woolf's "room of her own."

When the Mohel Is a Woman

Moving an ancient ritual into a new era

MOHEL DR. MARJORIE CRAMER PRESIDING OVER A BRIS. PHOTOS BY LLOYD WOLF.

by Ilana Trachtman, with Sarah Blustain

"I think you...fail to see how serious this circumcision business is to Jews. I am still hypnotized by uncircumcised men when I see them at my swimming pool locker room. The damn thing never goes unregistered....I asked several of my equally secular Jewish male friends if they could have an uncircumcised son, and they all said no, sometimes without having to think about it and sometimes after the nice long pause that any rationalist takes before opting for the irrational."

—Philip Roth, in a letter to Mary McCarthy. (New Yorker, Dec. 1998)

Jewish circumcision is the ultimate initiation rite. *Buck up,* it says to the Jewish newborn; *you've got to go through this to be a Jewish man. Buck up,* it says to the boy's father, *let's see if you've got the stomach for the Covenant. Tough luck,* it says to Jewish mothers and baby girls; *this is a boys' club; God didn't give you what it takes to join.*

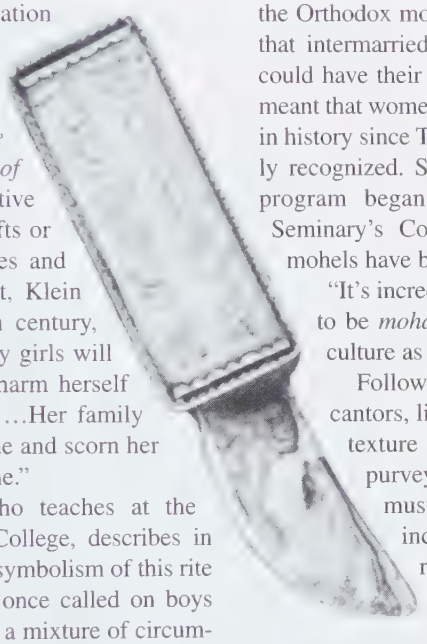
The arch old-Jewish-boy himself, Philip Roth, understands that. Abraham, circumcising his son Isaac, understood that. And Jewish circumcisers, who report mother after mother fleeing the scene, know that as well. But now, women are challenging that rite of initiation—not by protesting its existence, but by finding a way to take part.

To be a Jewish man is to be circumcised; and, until recently, to be a Jewish woman was to be excluded from the very first covenantal ritual in a Jewish life. But in the last decade, liberal Jewish institutions have begun to train non-Orthodox *mohels*—some 50 women among them. At a time when circumcision has come under attack as anachronistic and even harmful, the presence of female *mohels* raises other challenging questions: What does it mean that women—despite the limits of physiology—have found a way to participate in this historically male-on-male ritual? Does it change the ceremony's meaning? Does it change the old boys' club? Does it change the Covenant itself?

Brit mila always has been a boys' show: Centered on the male baby and anatomy, a male *mohel* presided, the father was toasted, and the male relatives participated in the enactment. Women stayed in the kitchen comforting the mother as she heard her baby cry in the next room. The mother entered only to receive the baby when the ceremony was over.

For centuries, the ceremony and circumcision were performed by the newborn boy's father. Later a professional substitute—the *mohel*—stood in while father and grandfather looked on. Throughout history, *mohels* have been exclusively men trained in apprenticeships with veteran *mohels*. Like many Jewish ritual trades, the profession was passed from father to son.

In addition, the *brit* was the culmination of a community-wide celebration of the birth of a boy. During the pre-*brit* "week of the son," writes scholar Michele Klein in her new book *A Time to Be Born: Customs and Folklore of Jewish Birth*, "the father hosted festive meals for the visitors, who brought gifts or money....It was customary for candles and lamps to burn all week." By contrast, Klein quotes a Baghdadi rabbi of the 19th century, who writes, "A women who bears only girls will be neglected and in her distress can harm herself [immediately after] the hour of birth....Her family and friends, husband and in-laws deride and scorn her as if she had committed a terrible crime."



CIRCUMCISION KNIFE. POLAND 1858. COLLECTION OF TEMPLE ISRAEL MUSEUM, GREAT NECK, NY

Professor Lawrence Hoffman, who teaches at the Reform movement's Hebrew Union College, describes in *Covenant of Blood* the "extreme sexist symbolism of this rite that has initiated a male lifeline, that once called on boys entering puberty to wash their hands in a mixture of circumcision blood and water, that contrasted male blood that saves with female blood that pollutes, and that became the dominant male ritual from which women were eventually forcefully excluded." The *brit* is so important, Jewish texts tell us, even a woman, a minor and a slave may perform it.

In 1984, under pressure to serve an increasingly diverse community, the Reform movement recognized the need for non-Orthodox mohels. Inspired by Dr. Debra Cohen's request for training (Conservative and Orthodox groups had turned her down), HUC came through. It created the Brit Milah Board, the first training program offered by any liberal Jewish institutions to train medical professionals—men and women alike—to perform ritual circumcision. Gender-blind on principle—women were already ordained as Reform rabbis—the movement didn't meditate on the intense historical chauvinism that surrounds Jewish circumcision. They were not concerned with the psychological question "What does it mean for a woman to preside?" The only question was, "Is there a need?"

When they asked that question, they found parents expressing a desire for their sons' *brit mila* ceremonies to reflect their own Jewish practices. It is reported that Orthodox *mohels* asked to preside over a *brit* have insisted that both parents be Jewish and heterosexual, and often exclude women from the ceremony, making *brit mila* uncomfortable and sometimes impossible for non-traditional couples hoping to raise a Jewish child.

"The opposition"—and there was plenty—"is more psychological and sociological than halachic," wrote the late Solomon Freehof, one of Reform Judaism's preeminent legal authorities, during that first controversial year. "Male functionaries through time have taken unto themselves certain ritual practices. The sociology of the Jewish community has enforced this practice and barred other competent and skilled practitioners from exercising their legal right."

The creation of the Brit Mila Board signified the end of the Orthodox monopoly in the business of the *brit*. It meant that intermarried, unmarried, and gay and lesbian couples could have their sons circumcised in a Jewish ritual. It also meant that women's right to perform a *brit*—for the first time in history since Tzipporah circumcised Moses—was officially recognized. Since the Hebrew Union College's Reform program began in 1984 and the Jewish Theological Seminary's Conservative program began in 1989, 260 mohels have been trained; 48 are women.

"It's incredibly important for women to have a chance to be *mohalot*—that women can contribute to Jewish culture as men can," says Cohen, the first *mohelet*.

Following the recognition of women as rabbis and cantors, licensing women to be *mohalot* enriches the texture of Jewish ceremonial leadership. But as purveyors of a sacred ceremony, the *mohelet* must grapple with the psychological and social incongruity of performing and perpetuating a ritual that excludes her on both religious and anatomical counts.

"It's quintessentially sexist, and all my feminist friends hate me for it, " says plastic surgeon Marjorie Cramer about her role as a *mohelet* and member of the Brit Mila Board of Reform Judaism, "but Judaism is too good to walk away from and leave to the men." So Cramer, like other *mohalot,* wades into what she calls a "weird, sexist, primitive, old-fashioned, superstitious ritual" with the faith that it is still meaningful for Jews, and that what she brings to it as a woman is nonetheless unique.

While Dorothy Greenbaum was studying for an adult confirmation at her synagogue, her rabbi signed her up for a certification course to become a *mohelet*. "It was *bashert*," says Greenbaum, a pediatrician. "To have, at that moment, an outlet for my blooming love for Judaism that would combine with my medical skills, well, it was too good to be a coincidence."

Greenbaum exudes: "To move an ancient ritual into the 21st century and keep it alive for young people...this is a vanguard I am privileged to be a part of. This is a new song, using the same old words. It's really exciting to be a part of this."

Most *mohalot*—all of whom are doctors—base the cer-

emony on a manual from either the Reform or Conservative movements. The prayers are the same as those said in an Orthodox ceremony. But whereas, as one *mohelet* described it, Orthodox *mohels* may "come in, shoo the women out of the room, mumble prayers, and leave," *mohalot* are tailoring their ceremonies to match and include the families they serve. They aim at inspiration, making language more gender-neutral, adding commentary, and offering translations, all of which enrich and soften an otherwise upsetting and intimidating ritual.

"I see my job to educate, to make people feel comfortable, instead of alienated, so they walk away [from the *brit*] and feel happy to be Jewish," comments Emily Blake, a *mohelet* from New York City. "I want to shine an attractive light on the Jewish faith, so that the parents see it as something beautiful they want to give to their children."

This role of includer, of hostess even, welcoming new baby and family into Judaism's tent, is a joy cited by *mohalim,* regardless of gender. "When you have parents who haven't had anything to do with Judaism since their wedding, [and as a result of the *brit]* they become more involved, it's a wonderful thing," says Barry Meisel, obstetrician/gynecologist, *mohel* and chairman of the Brit Milah board.

Debra Schlossberg, a *mohelet* in a Chicago suburb, always includes an explanation of why Jews perform *brit mila.* Cramer likes to have a female relative serve as *sandek,* the person who holds the baby during the circumcision, an honor usually bestowed on the baby's grandfather. Blake gives a discourse on the historical chain of the ritual, and her medical interpretation of *brit mila.* "God doesn't pretend to put us here fully formed, or perfect," she says, reflecting one traditional line of Jewish thinking that says God creates man imperfect—uncircumcised—so that man must work to perfect himself. "We circumcise to help make the baby perfect, just as the people in this room have to instill love and ethics in this new life to help him grow up perfect."

Perhaps because they are doctors, and perhaps because they are women, female *mohels* seem to enjoy the trust from families that they will put the child, and the family, more at ease. Being a mother, Greenbaum believes, has influenced her attitude about the circumcision surgery itself. One current debate centers on whether to use anesthetic during the *brit.* Greenbaum favors its use; she also feeds the baby beforehand, swaddles him, and gives him a sugar sucker to release endorphins that help ameliorate the pain. All of these steps make the baby more comfortable.

"This is maternal experience," she says. "If we have the knowledge of how to make things pain-free, it's divinely inspired knowledge. If we don't use it, it's as though we are turning our back on something God-given."

Greenbaum likes to begin the ceremony with a "chain of tradition." In this ceremony, the child is passed to the *mohelet* through the hands of all the grandparents and parents, who in the process offer their private blessing over the child. For children of mixed marriages, she simply calls it "the chain of love." Greenbaum also adds a prayer of thanksgiving for the parents to recite and her own blessing in honor of people lost in the Holocaust. It reads: "In a century in which we have lost so many, we are so very grateful for this new Jewish life."

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"I make people feel comfortable instead of alienated. They walk away happy to be Jewish."

—Mohelet Dorothy Greenbaum

She explains about the Holocaust prayer: "Some of the families I have worked with have been turned away by Orthodox *mohalim,* especially if the child's mother is not Jewish. To me that is an affront. Here is a child of Jewish ancestry whose parents are going to raise him Jewish and they are going to turn him away when so many have died."

At the end of the *brit,* Greenbaum blesses the entire family with a slightly modified priestly blessing. "May God bless you and keep you, may God watch over you and be gracious unto you, may God grant you health and love and joy and *mazel* to your beautiful new child and that most precious of all gifts, the gift of people in your home." When she is finished, Greenbaum notes, there are few dry eyes.

Without the option of *mohels* such as Meisel and Blake, many families wishing for a Jewish ritual to sanctify their

baby's birth would be denied. Greenbaum's recent client list reflects the diversity of Jews seeking to sanctify their lives through this ritual: in addition to many "ordinary" Jewish couples, she has served a family with two fathers, a Reform Jewish couple, an intermarried couple, an Israeli couple speaking out against Orthodoxy. Some guests may be surprised to see a woman in an unfamiliar role, but any objection is usually limited to, "I didn't know a woman could do that," says Beverly Siegal, a *mohelet* in Los Angeles.

"Older women," says Cramer, "are especially positive. One women said to me, "That's it. Now I've lived long enough to have a great-grandchild, and to have a woman do the *brit!*"

© LLOYD WOLF

Having female mohels risks sidelining fathers even more from pregnancy and birth.

—Psychoanalyst Miriam Schacter

Greenbaum states, "One of the biggest honors after performing a *brit* is when someone comes up to me and says, "This was a beautiful *brit*. I apologize for the prejudice I felt before I heard you.'"

Orthodox Opposition

Today, though sanctioned by the Reform and Conservative governing bodies, *mohalot* still confront obstacles of centuries-old expectation and custom, as well as categorical disapproval from the Orthodox community.

Orthodoxy criticizes Reform Judaism for its departure from *halachic* observance, and generally refuses to recognize. Reform leaders as Jewish authorities. Therefore female *mohels* are "unkosher" according to Orthodoxy first and foremost because they are Reform Jews, and second because they are women. While some Reform *mohels* enjoy positive relationships with Orthodox leaders (some Orthodox hospital chaplains will even refer Reform new parents to a Reform *mohel* or *mohelet),* at least two *mohalot* in the New York area have experienced outright harassment. Orthodox *mohels* have contacted their clients, warning that a *brit* performed by a *mohelet* is unkosher and would have to be performed again. One new father in New York, Raz Blit, says he was offered $100 by an Orthodox mohel if he would call off his contract with a female *mohel.* (He refused.)

Orthodox feminist Blu Greenberg recognizes her own "conditioning that *bris* was something women weren't supposed to be involved in or even come near," she says. But "as it fits into the category of new religious roles and responsibilities for women, I do think it's a good thing. There shouldn't be any stigma attached, it's halachically permissible, and *kol ha-kavod* to the women who do it."

Occasionally, *mohalot* experience cancellations out of respect for the protestations of a religious parent or grandparent. "This is rare," emphasized Greenbaum, and is balanced by such experiences as performing a *brit* in an Orthodox synagogue, alongside an Orthodox rabbi, for a family that felt strongly about having her involvement.

Still, New York psychoanalyst Miriam Schacter, who describes herself as a traditionally observant feminist, suggests that the real downside to female *mohels* is that it sidelines fathers even more from the very female-oriented processes of pregnancy, birth and nursing. "Men have to bend themselves into a pretzel to be part of it," she says. "If we take this away from men too, then…how would we like men to become part of this process?! Particularly in this stage of life, I think we have to work hard to find a place for the men."

Freud's Nightmare?

The fact that female *mohels* are doctors and highly professional allows people to sidestep the question of gender to some extent. But these are, after all, women wielding knives in pursuit of the foreskin, and in the post-Freud era the gender significance must at least raise eyebrows. One *mohelet* bitterly related a male relative's joke: "Still performing circumcisions? Would you trust *your* son's penis to feminist?"

Most of the *mohalot* interviewed had few encounters with fears or anger connected to their role as circumcisers.

The issues, however, are subtle. Schacter, a classically trained psychoanalyst, sometimes explores her male patients' feelings about the moment of their own *brit.* And, she comments, at a *brit,* men often joke about castration.

"If I have patients in psychoanalysis who are male," she told LILITH, "I will address with them their fantasies about being circumcised. God often comes into the picture, because God is the reason for the circumcision. But they also talk about castration by the father....The castration stuff with the fathers, it's usually competitive. With the mothers, it would be the engulfing, intrusive castrating mother."

Reform leaders, however, are less concerned with these psychological questions. "Is it to be viewed in psychological and Freudian terms or is it to be viewed in terms of the religious meaning of the service?" asks Rabbi Lewis Barth, who presided over the creation of the Reform *mohel* program. Willing to ask the question, he seems wary of the psychological adventure it invites. "This is a religious moment, and its evaluation is in a different class of human experience....The religious dimension takes over. "

What Do We Do for Our Girls?

Though Greenbaum feels the same Covenant—both divine and human—devolves on the Jewish woman through her ability to give birth, many new parents have not been satisfied by this "different but equal" approach. The fact of so much attention to the newborn boy forces the question, as *mohelet* Emily Blake asks, "What are we saying to our girls if we only make a big hullabaloo over our boys?" There is a gaping hole where a parallel, obligatory covenant for baby girls should be.

Without exception, the *mohalot* interviewed for this article enthusiastically express a desire to create and perform a *brit bat* (literally a "covenant for the girl," more commonly translated as "baby naming") for Jewish baby girls. "In my mind," says Cramer, "God's Covenant was with all Jews, not just with men."

The fact is, an entire mini-industry of ritual makers and creative parents has sprung up to try to match the *brit* with a female counterpart. In Elise Herman's Washington State town of 13,000—which includes a small percentage of Jews—every Jewish baby girl has a naming. Since the town lacks a local rabbi, she and her husband—a rare example of a husband-and-wife team of *mohels*—perform them as well. "If we had ceremonies [only] for boys, it would be like the synagogue wasn't acknowledging the girl. It would feel like they were excluding me. I can't even imagine it," she says. "The baby naming ceremonies for my daughters were the high points of my life....I had this tremendous feeling of tradition, that I was introducing my daughters to the Jewish community and that they were taking their places in a long line of Jewish women."

Time and again, however, parents and theologians complain that these ceremonies, while beautiful, lack the raw impact of the physical act of circumcision. The *brit bat* ceremony, while not standardized, usually includes a naming and recitation of the *Mi-Shebeirakh* prayer. Some parents incorporate symbolic substitutes for the circumcision, such as touching the baby's hand to the Torah scroll, wrapping her in a *tallit,* or washing her feet. In a controversial article in the 1970s, Mary Gendler suggested that a small nick be made on the genitalia of Jewish baby girls. Needless to say, this never caught on—and is less likely to now since the very appropriate outcry over female genital mutilation in other cultures.

In another attempt to resolve the question, Professor Hoffman, of HUC, suggests that both men and women enter into the *brit,* the covenant, equally. "If the *mila* [the circumcision] is merely a necessary byproduct of covenant for men, but not for women, it is not altogether obvious that men are privileged in the least."

So *mohalot,* caught in the pull between a male ritual and their own femaleness, struggle to find an equally symbolic ritual. "I would love to see the naming take on the force of the *brit.* I would love to see people scurrying around on the eighth day after their daughter's birth to find someone to come to their home and perform the ceremony," says Cramer. But what would that ceremony be?

Recently , Herman received a call from a pregnant woman who wanted to employ her services if she had a boy. When Herman asked her what she would do the case of a girl, the mother-to-be answered, "Oh, then anyone can do the [welcoming] ceremony."

"It's really been bugging me," Herman mused. "I feel that I had specific training in the history and blessings and the meaning of the Covenant, which makes a *mohel* entering [a child into] the Covenant in a more formal way have more significance, more impact."

Indeed, the question of a ceremony for girls has traditionally focused on what is being done *to* the child, rarely on *who* is doing the ceremony, *when* the ceremony is performed, and *what* it signifies. Herman offers an alternative. "The *bris* [offers] a sense of being enveloped by the Jewish community, and it doesn't matter so much whether you do that with a surgical procedure or not. A naming for a girl has to do with welcoming the child and what you wish for the child. I think the intent of the ceremony is the same."

If what these *mohalot* say is true, then the *brit* is potentially matched by an official ceremony for girls, conducted by an official emcee trained to give girls an entrance into the Covenant with a *brit,* minus the circumcision. Such a thought is possible in large part thanks to the efforts of women *mohels,* who have been changing the texture and the understanding of the *brit.*

"This is holy work," comments Blu Greenberg about *mohalot.* "I am happy that women perform the *mitzvah,* not just for the new parents, but for the whole community. *Brit mila,* after all, is the whole community's enterprise, and it serves all of us to bring a child into the Covenant." ■

Ilana Trachtman is a television producer in New York City.

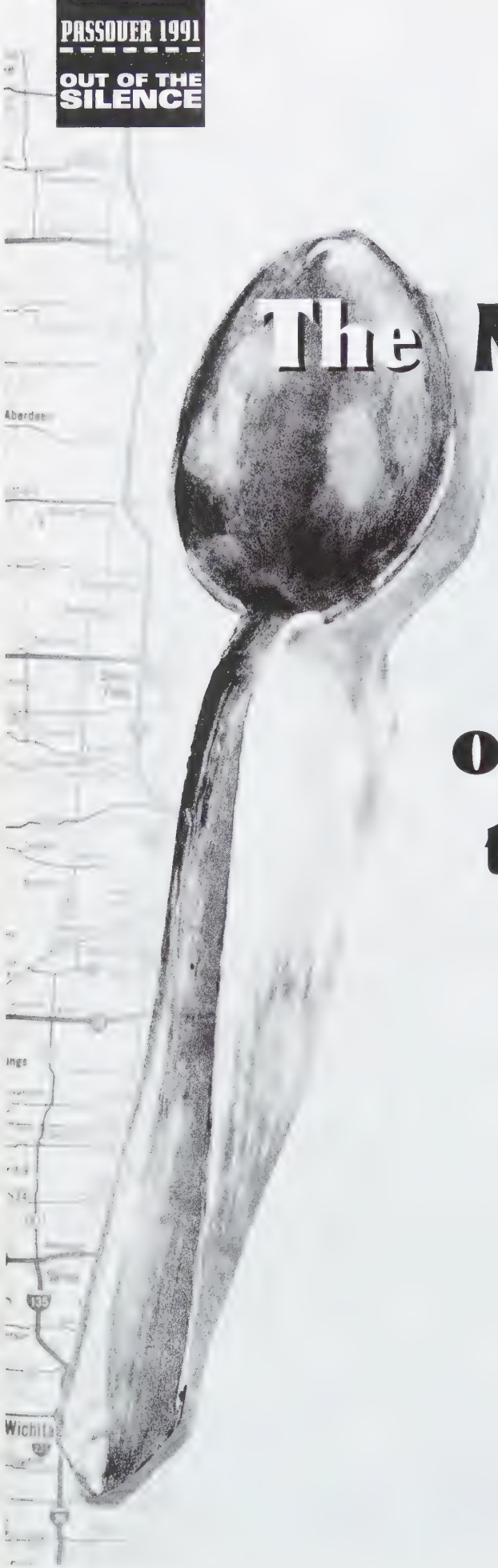
LAURIE DOUGLAS

God No. 2

by Lisa Bernstein (Lisa B)

My God who is the bodies of all the men I've loved
the breasts I could not suck enough
who is the cat's body
with the eyelashes of a doll
and the hardness of a doll's plastic chest
who is the black space in the sky
the stars like holes stabbed
bleeding and stupid to be killed like a thief
restless a tribe of outcasts in the desert
who is unpronounceable
who is carved in stone
particles of sand and granite adhering into a tablet
a forgotten language
who is the bodies in mass graves
the mossy hair overgrown above the graves
the mulch the lily the chlorophyll filling the air the
    cow's gnashing teeth the meat
God who is the calcium the code inside the
    chromosomes the rebellion of the cells
My God with the whisper
with the whiskery laughing
with the singing like rain hammering on the roof of
    the universe
resonating through my teeth
and through the whiskey-throated singer
God of can't stop me
God of no sorrow
saying write me write me write

Lisa Bernstein (Lisa B) is the author of two books of poetry and is a contributor to many magazines and anthologies including Beyond Lament: Poets of the World Bearing Witness to the Holocaust. *She is also a singer and songwriter. "God No. 2" is included on her first full-length CD "Free Me for the Joy," available from Piece of Pie Records, P. O. Box 20663, Oakland, CA 94620.*



The Morning My Father Met Ernest Hemingway on the Way to the Promised Land

by Judy Labensohn

The Haggadah tells us that five second-century rabbis stayed up all night retelling the story of the Exodus from Egypt. They must have been fine, natural-born storytellers because when my father, a taciturn man, finally told me the story of his own exodus from Fort Dodge, Iowa, it took only twelve minutes.

"Tell me about Iowa," I dared to say.

We were sitting at the dining room table in his Cleveland apartment on a nippy October morning in 1991. It was Sukkot, when my people remember (once again) our wanderings in the desert. I had wandered from my home in Jerusalem to fulfill the commandment of visiting the sick. Dad, eighty-eight and failing, wore a gray and white seersucker bathrobe. His right hand was paralyzed from a stroke, so I had to feed him his oatmeal. With one beady eye, he followed the spoon from bowl to mouth as if tracking a golf ball on the green. His other eye was glued to the TV screen, tracking the fluctuations of AT&T on his favorite channel.

"Tell me about Iowa," I repeated.

Nobody else was home this particular morning, so the background sounds a house makes resonated clearly around my released words. I used to call these sounds Silence—Home during the years I lived in Cleveland and my father never talked to me. Only when I was seventeen did my father begin looking in my direction. Then he spewed simple statements, truisms like "Long-haired boys who demonstrate against the Vietnam War should be castrated," or "Poets can't pay rent."

Asking Dad to speak while eating and watching something he loved was a technique I learned from my sister. After she decided to go to graduate school, she forced herself to endure a Cleveland Browns football game in ten below temperatures. While Dad chomped a hot dog and counted yards, she popped the question: "Will you pay the tuition?" Of course he agreed with no discussion. Jim Brown was four yards from a touchdown.

"What do you want to know about Iowa for?" he snapped, darting both eyes now from the stocks to the spoon and then back again to Wall Street.

"I just do, Dad. I need a story."

seder?" or "What kinda idiotic question is that—'What was Annie Oakley like?'" or "How the hell should I know why I left at twenty-five."

So I listened as a thirsty traveler in the desert might do, her ear pressed to the earth for underground springs. The sounds a house makes became fainter, now overpowered by an old man recalling his journey.

"Needed to improve my selling ability so took a Dale Carnegie course. Then I bought a furniture store. Wasn't cut out for that so moved to Chicago. Sold butter and eggs door to door."

My listening pulsated because I wanted to be sure each word stuck to that inner sanctuary where stories lodge. Even though my father's exodus sounded more like the last chapter of the Book of Numbers, in which the biblical storyteller lists the watering holes used by the Children of Israel on their way to the Promised Land, they were words. And they were being offered to me.

"Didn't do well in Chicago so tried Detroit. Met a man there who convinced me to go to Cuba with him for a vacation. We're in this elevator in Havana and who walks in but Ernest Hemingway. You once read a book of his, didn't you?"

"What do you want to know about Iowa for?" my father snapped. Until this morning, I had settled for little interaction, so we were both surprised by my request.

Until this morning our conversations were four-sentence interchanges, reliable as a tennis volley: "How are you? Fine. Everything under control? Yep." We had learned to settle for little interaction, so he was probably as surprised as I by my request.

"Ah hell. There was no Jewish community out there. Only seven poor families. Once I saw Annie Oakley. We had the *seder* at our house. Never built a Sukkah. Left when I was twenty-five. Before the Crash. Took a train to New York with my brother, your uncle. Worked in a grocery store for five months. Knew the business cause my father, your grandfather, had a store in Fort Dodge."

For the first time, I understood the meaning of *in media res*. Each half sentence raised more questions than it answered, but his telling was so novel and rare that I feared any request for clarification, embellishment, or interpretation might stop the flow. He'd say, "Whaddya mean, who led the

The spoon full of oatmeal is suspended in mid-air between us. He is feeding me and I him, an old man struggling with the forces of nature.

"He was smoking a cigar. Handsome man. Big fellow."

I put the spoon in his mouth and he swallows.

My father likes history, not literature, specifically the history of the Civil War. He thinks Abraham Lincoln was the best president and said so religiously during the nightly newscasts of Huntley-Brinkley, when I was in high school. Abe's walking miles to school every day, even in snow, impressed my father because, like Abe, Dad believed in the curative power of suffering and hard work. If I suffered more, I thought during the news, maybe I could be President and gain my father's attention.

"Butter and egg business in Detroit wasn't any good so I came down here to Cleveland. Your uncle and I opened a creamery on the West Side. Then I met your mom.

Did everything late."

I let the spoon drop into the bowl as Dad's exodus ends in Cleveland, the Cuyahoga his Jordan River. He puts his unparalyzed hand on mine and together we lift the next spoonful to his mouth. Some of the oatmeal falls on his chin, the rest on his bib.

"Doesn't matter," he says. "I took your mom skating and then we got married. Then your sister was born and then you. Got married late. Made money late. Had children late."

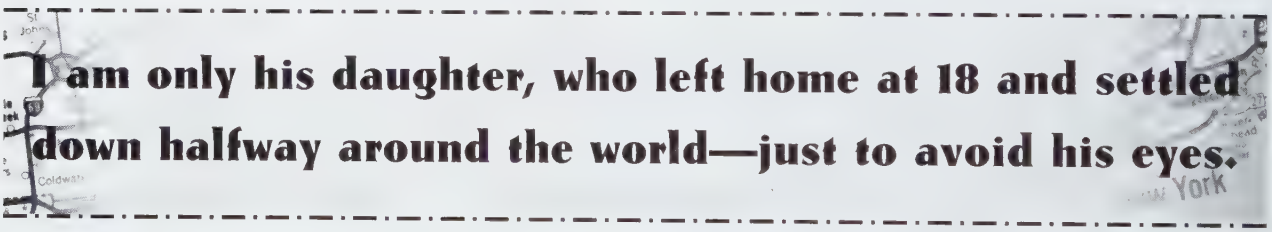
He pauses. Both small, red eyes focus on the wall behind me. A black and white family portrait, framed in gold, hangs there. For a moment, he looks like he is trying to peer beyond the sixty-year-old man in the photo and imagine the thirty-six-year-old shy wanderer, seeing my mother for the first time at the ice skating rink. How beautiful she looks, just a young girl of twenty with soft brown hair, gray eyes, perfect skin, a girl full of promise who offers the possibility of finally settling down. Then he asks for a glass of orange juice.

I get up and walk into the kitchen, open the fridge and take out a carton of Tropicana. When I turn around, he is standing unusually close to me in the middle of the kitchen in his seersucker robe. His shaky hand, holding the empty glass, reaches out to me.

"I love you," he says.

The fridge hums.

His bleary eyes focus on my face, a face that resembles his around the mouth and nose. I am neither a Cleveland Browns quarterback, nor a stock market screen. Nor am I the financial page of the Cleveland Plain Dealer, behind which he hid during the years I lived with him. I am just his daughter, a forty-six-year-old woman who left home at eighteen and settled down halfway around the world in the original Promised Land. I am only his daughter, who wandered for years, just to avoid his eyes.



The gray and white seersucker robe leans towards me and the frail, paralyzed man inside sets a tight-lipped kiss on my right cheek with the same precision he set golf balls on tees for so many Saturday and Sunday afternoons. The walls purr.

"I love you too, Dad," I say, and kiss his unshaven, sunken cheek where his dentures no longer fill out his mouth.

The words come out naturally, as if telling this old man I love him is as easy as saying "Pass the butter."

Then I take the empty glass from his hand and hold it, aware that these fifteen seconds probably constitute the most important moment in my life, its pinnacle, a moment after which my perception of the world may be irrevocably changed, an event as momentous as the splitting of the Red Sea.

But in order to fully absorb what has transpired, I have to freeze the moment, turn it into a still life, full of drama and hope, like the Renaissance renditions of the Exodus. I must release the three words we both said from their particular context so that I can bask in the warmth of being loved by a cold father, not just for one moment in October of 1991 in Cleveland, Ohio, but for years to come and in any place I call Home. I want to subjectively revel in being the object of that idealized sentence, the sentence I longed to hear for forty-plus years. And like my father, I am starting late.

My father smiles coyly after I tell him I love him, as if I have told him his robe is dirty. I pour the juice and carry the full glass back to the dining room table. He takes up his position opposite the TV screen and after taking a sip of juice with his straw, continues.

"We moved back to Iowa but your mom didn't like it so we moved back to Cleveland and your brother was born and I called it the Promised Land because I started making money with the creamery and I owned a few trucks by then so I shipped butter and eggs from Iowa to Ohio and it became a good business in the '70s and I'll never forget the day Annie Oakley came to Fort Dodge I must have been seven or eight and she came with Wild Bill Hickock in a Wild West Show and they shot up the place it was the damnedest thing I ever saw and my father beat me for coming home late because he had a redhead's temper and once some kid in my class called me a Christ-killer and I didn't know what the hell he was talking about so I asked my father your grandfather and at the *seder* he told me we never killed anybody and Abraham I mean Moses led us out of slavery cause we wanted to reach the Promised Land and when I was twenty-five I left home took a train out east took a train to New York because my father your grandfather ... because my father ... because of my ..."

He grabs the edge of the dining room table with his unparalyzed hand as if to steady himself from falling. Suddenly, his eyes close and he bows his head. His face contorts. He looks like the shadow of the old man in Hemingway's book, trying to keep something buried deep inside him, something overwhelming, from coming up. Then, with eyes closed, he shakes his head from side to side and repeats over and over in a voice which penetrates the generations of wandering Jews, "Because of my father ... because of my father." ■

Judy Labensohn is a writer and poet in Jerusalem. She works at Neot Kedumim, the Biblical Landscape Reserve near Modi'in. Diving Into Mt. Zion, *her memoir, is nearing completion.*

WATCHING THE FIRE

by Helen Schary Motro

My 29-year-old mother was smuggled out of the walls of the Warsaw Ghetto one month before its obliteration. She had lived within the city all her life and inside the Ghetto since its creation, and had known hundreds in her home town by name, thousands by sight. But by March 1943 out of all of them—the girl who knew all the answers at school, the aunt whose dog sat beside her table eating from a plate, the dentist whose wife ran away to Paris, the geometry tutor who gave up early on my mother's math—out of all the people, her father and her husband were the only ones she had left.

Her father and her husband both were essential in her escape. She felt that in some way, however coincidentally, both of them perished because of it. In the war, my mother says, coincidence could be everything.

To run away from the Ghetto and come out alive was almost an impossibility; my mother managed it twice. Her husband orchestrated the first breakout. While her husband scrambled desperately to get her false papers, she lay hidden on the Aryan side, stowed away in the goose cellar of Christina, her family's pre-war housecleaner. Christina's husband objected, but Christina let her stay among the geese. When asked why this woman had risked her life for her—they would have been shot on sight had my mother been detected—my mother says, "I was kind to her when she worked at our home." She shrugs. "I was lucky with people."

Meanwhile my mother's husband had scurried all through the underground, among the smugglers and traders of forged documents, trying to buy her a new, safe identity. He could not do it. After a week Christina's husband prevailed. They turned my mother out. Walking the streets without papers was too dangerous. So she had no other choice. Having escaped from the Ghetto without being caught—one chance in a million—she had to go back in.

Her husband hatched and carried out the second rescue too. But for the plan to work he knew he needed money. He had nobody to turn to except others as poor as they.

Her husband disguised my mother as a young man, then managed to sneak her into a labor crew being marched out to work on the "Aryan" side of Warsaw. There were 12 to be accounted for; my mother's presence brought the number up to 13. But the German guard had been paid off to look the other way when she ducked under the checkpost spotlights.

How did they get the money for this bribe? The only possession of value left was her father's overcoat. Her father was by then even more alone than they. His wife—my mother's

mother—had been snared half a year earlier in the first great round-up for Treblinka. My mother stood in between her husband and her father while her husband asked. And when, in their unheated room, they told her father the escape plan, and what they needed to carry it off, he slipped off the coat and handed it to her. Maybe he felt in his bones that the winter just over would be his last. Maybe he calculated that between the two of them, his strong young daughter had the better chance to survive. Maybe he simply had ceased to care. Over the last 50 years, the memory of this one coat has haunted her—as if that thin wool might somehow miraculously have saved the aging man from annihilation.

Her husband, too, escaped the Ghetto. He lived with a group of Christian laborers and worked shoveling bricks from houses destroyed in the bombardments. My mother and her husband made up to meet every week at the construction site where he worked; it was the most they could risk to see each other, and even that was probably too much. Twice she found him there; the third time he was nowhere to be seen. She paced around the block, then circled again, and once again. She waited for an hour, two hours, three, studying everyone. Then, unable to hold herself back, she approached the worker with the least threatening demeanor and described her husband. The man looked both ways and leaned down close, "Gone. Taken away," he whispered. My mother hurried off. There was no more reason to loiter at the dangerous place where undesirables had been discovered and deported. She knew her husband would not be back.

The christening feast lasted for three days.

It took the Ghetto longer than that to burn.

My mother's husband had procured false papers before she left the Ghetto for that second escape. With them, she took on the identity of a dead Ukrainian girl named Helenka. She found work as a housekeeper. One month later the reincarnated Helenka stood in a steaming kitchen on the Aryan side cooking an Easter dinner.

The dinner coincided with the christening party of a first-born baby girl, daughter of her new employers. Despite the war, luxuries had been obtained for the important occasion. Helenka was put in charge of the cooking, she who had hardly been allowed to so much as boil an egg in her parents' pre-war apartment. She was tall, unusual among Polish Jews, and her Polish was pure, so she might look the part. Despite her dark hair and dark eyes, eyes whose sad expression it was said unmasked many an imposter. But it wasn't only your face that could expose you. Wearing a maid's uniform and a white lace cap, she peeled the potatoes with thick ungainly strokes and hoped her clumsy heavy-handedness would not divulge her secret.

The party's *pièce de resistance* was a pig, to be roasted and served whole. Helenka grimly sprinkled seasonings on this carcass. In the main room the guests had already arrived, their faces flushed with vodka and the excuse to celebrate. Helenka bent her head down to work. Through the doors she heard the verses of folk ballads, the tinkling of glasses, the brittle laughter of women.

The cooking and bustle had heated up the kitchen, and the window was flung wide open to let in the cool spring air. Helenka glanced up and out of the window beside her. It was nighttime, yet the sky was pink. A huge cloud of black smoke billowed over half the horizon.

There were no aerial bombardments—the Germans had conquered Warsaw years before. But the smell of smoke penetrated every apartment in Warsaw. Yet there were no sirens of fire engines, no sign of alarm in the streets. Everything was deadly still except the sulfurous smoke and the sounds of the merrymaking in the next room. With growing horror she peered at the column of smoke and made out its origin. Then Helenka knew what she was seeing. Filling the sky was the Ghetto on fire. A fire nobody was trying to extinguish.

The christening feast lasted for three days, but it took the Ghetto longer than that to burn, closer to weeks.

Later, after the war, my mother would learn the details.

Following the great transports to Treblinka the previous fall, to which her mother had fallen prey, and after the decimation of the population through starvation and disease, only 60,000 were left inside the Ghetto by the spring of 1943, in an area that at its height had forced in almost half a million people.

The Nazis decided to liquidate the Ghetto in a quick action set to last three days. But when they rolled in on April 19, they were stunned to be met by armed resistance, a doomed uprising by a few hundred young men and women. Amazed by the gunfire, the Germans decided to destroy the Ghetto by methodically setting every single block ablaze. People had the choice of suffocating in the flames, jumping to their death, or surrendering to the trains, trains that departed full up for the gas chambers of Treblinka. In the last bitter weeks some Ghetto inhabitants tried to escape through the sewers over to the other side; smoke bombs were thrown down, the sewers were flooded, yet a few succeeded. The final inhabitants were smoked out of bunkers and rubble, then shot. By the end, not one human being was left alive within the Warsaw Ghetto, where less than a year before 400,000 had lived. After the last fire burned itself out on May 16, 1943, whatever ruins were left standing were razed, and the S.S. officer in charge of the operation could report: "The Warsaw Ghetto is no more."

Of all the stories my mother has told—of swollen malnutrition, of typhus and frozen corpses, of mothers watching their children linger and then die, of the starving stealing bread from the starved, of clothes of the

arrested being sent back minus the person, of dogs named "Man" ordered to bite men called "Dogs," of countless humiliations and losses, of miraculous escapes, near-misses, and tragic disappearances—this fiery landscape of the Ghetto burning is the strongest wartime image she has left us with.

For as my mother told me what she saw through the window that night, I was seeing her: A young woman holding on for dear life to her own life, clutching to a dead stranger's identity. As she pretended to be another, cut off from every other human being she had ever known, I imagined her stunned beyond tears, watching the shards of her past being scorched to ashes.

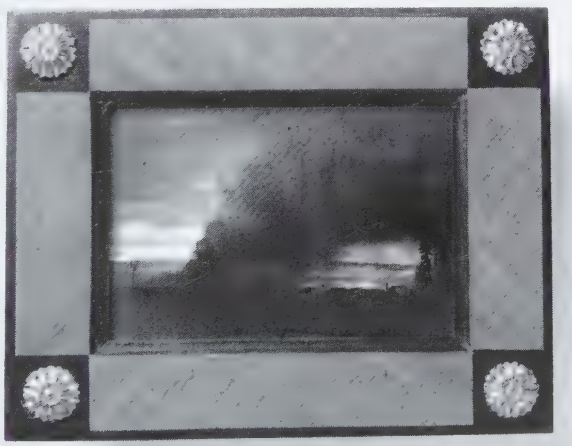
Looking at the conflagration, Helenka knew that to stay alive herself, she had to pretend indifference.

"The Jews are burning!" one guest cried merrily, pointing happily to the viscous smoke. My mother nodded. As she watched the Ghetto burn, Helenka went on dressing the pig.

Last year, 54 Aprils later, I too saw the Ghetto burning. In the bookshop of a museum in Tel Aviv, I stood leafing through a thick album, a collection of photographs from Poland.

Then, on page 179, I saw it. Shot in the outdated techniques of early color photos was a single image—billowing black smoke conquering the sky of an anonymous city. The caption at the bottom of the page confirmed what I knew before I read its small print. This picture, it said, was the only known existing color photograph showing the destruction of the Warsaw ghetto. It could have been snapped from the steaming kitchen window where Helenka stood cooking.

Until that moment, the Ghetto in flames had been a symbol in my mother's stories of a never-never-land of surrealistic horror. I knew that for many in my family—grandparents and cousins—the Warsaw Ghetto had been the stop before their last. Yet never before had I imagined it as a tangible place. The conflagration, indeed the whole Ghetto experience, floated in a sort of extraterritorial reality



The elusive photo of Warsaw burning.

I knew it irrational, yet I would have my mother the sole witness of the blaze. For me there were only two things that had existed in the world that night: the Ghetto burning and my young mother watching it through the window. And those black clouds of smoke represented the pain that continued to smolder in my mother's soul. The pain that, to her suppressed and ultimate horror, she must realize she passed on against her will to me.

I put down the book and fled outside. None of the tourists crossing the courtyard into the museum seemed to notice a woman leaning against the concrete side of the building, shading her eyes against the intense light of the spring sun.

It took me six months to get a copy of that photograph. I couldn't find it anywhere for sale. Finally I located the volume in the reference room at the main branch of the New York Public Library, but they had no color copier available to the public.

I had just about resigned myself to the fuzzy black and white photocopy I had managed to obtain in the library when, coincidentally, I heard from my friend that she thought she had seen the book at her friend's apartment. Coincidence, it seemed, could still be everything.

I telephoned this friend of a friend, not quite knowing how to phrase my strange request. On page 179, plate 311 of a certain book of hers was there a picture of the Ghetto burning? I held on. Yes, came her surprised and bewildered reply. And could I borrow the book and photocopy that one page?

I carried the heavy book and the light envelope of copies at once tightly and gingerly beneath my arm. The color copies looked better than the original. I had made four. One for myself. One for my daughter. One for my cousin who, like me, never met the grandfather who had sacrificed his overcoat. And one spare copy, just in case.

I felt no need to include the identifying caption in my prints. All of us who have heard my mother tell her story have stood in that kitchen too, with the heat on our wet foreheads, with the window open, wearing a white maid's cap, dressing that holiday pig, our throats acrid from the Ghetto's smoke.

And maybe that is the explanation for my unexpected and tenacious need to possess the burning Ghetto. Maybe the real photograph in its solid frame hanging on the stone walls of my life will prove that it was no imagined nightmare, either for my mother or for me. Or perhaps the physical picture will demystify the myth, allow it to rejoin the past and to sleep, if not quietly, at least fitfully so.

I have not been able to tell my mother any of the story I've written here. When she comes into my room, would she recognize what she saw? I didn't give her the chance. Whenever I expected my mother at my house I took the photo down, and slipped it behind some books. For her, I thought, to see the Ghetto burning once was fire enough.

But once I forgot to hide it. And when my mother came in, she glanced at the wall—and passed the blaze right by. If she recognized the Ghetto burning, she didn't say. ■

Helen Schary Motro is an American attorney and writer living in Israel. She is a columnist for The Jerusalem Post newpaper and fiction editor of the WIN electronic magazine. Her work appears in the international and American press including the International Herald Tribune.

When Our Parents Neglected Us to Save the World...

Gone were the days of Zionist summer camps, socialist meetings held every other night and slipping out at 2 a.m. to paint "Free the Rosenbergs" on the sidewalk. It was now the mid-1960s. Bobbi and Stan, a young artistic couple from the Lower East Side, moved to Boston and with a grant from the American Friends Service Committee they started a traveling drama troupe in an old school bus. They called it Caravan Theater. Their first play was about fascism, their second, racism. They'd perform anywhere, in any community that housed them for the night and paid them twenty-five bucks. After a year, they abandoned the bus but kept the troupe.

Bobbi and Stan didn't plan on children. The first, they illegally aborted. The second and third, Bobbi—scared and unsure—swallowed pills from a bottle that clearly stated: Do not take if pregnant. Her plan didn't work.

When I try to imagine what it must have been like for my activist parents to suddenly find themselves the guardians of two baby girls, I see a youthful couple, bewildered, asking: Whose kids are these? And more importantly, what can we do with them while we're off trying to save the world?

I grew up in the basement of a big stone church in Harvard Square, Cambridge, Massachusetts. I didn't spend my childhood in this sanctuary for any God-related reason; my parents were culturally Jewish, and committed atheists. What I was doing was waiting, waiting for my mother and father to finish working so we could finally return home. They never finished working.

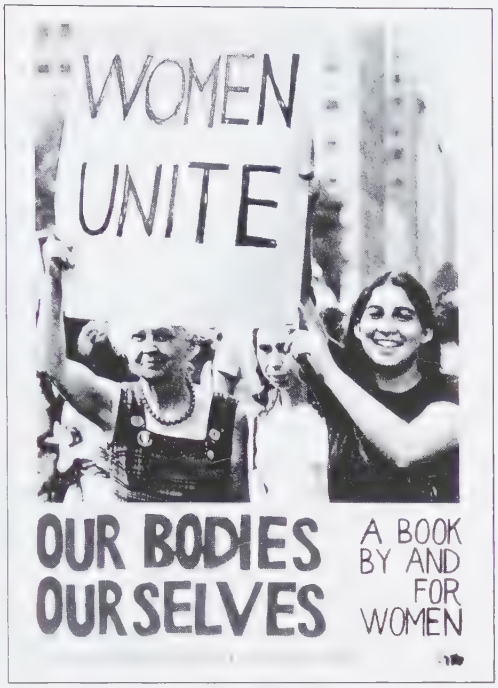
Firm believers in social change, deeply committed to political activism, my parents spent years trying to convert others to their revolutionary beliefs. Instead of an altar, they used a stage. Instead of a bible, they used scripts. A Methodist minister had invited the traveling theater to call his church home. When my parents moved the troupe in, they brought with them the belief that when there's something radically wrong with a society, there needs to be a radical change. They also believed that

by Rivka Ketzel Solomon

there's no time like the present to act, and no-one like themselves to do it. This belief, strong in Jewish culture, has historically motivated Jews toward social activism. To paraphrase the great sage, Rabbi Hillel, If not now, when? If not me, who?

In place of children's bedtime stories, my older sister and I got nightly doses of intense live drama depicting the struggles of people in pain, people pushing for change. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, while the United States was in the midst of social upheaval—the civil rights movement, anti-war protests, struggles for gay and women's rights—my parents' plays fiercely, heatedly, enacted these struggles. And sucking our thumbs, dragging around our baby blankets, night after night my sister and I got front row seats.

My appreciation of this proximity, however, came later—years later. It was a time-released appreciation, something that grew the more I was able to distance myself and understand both what I got and what I had to give up in this childhood immersed in my parents' activism.



Instead of bedtime stories, I got a front row seat at political dramas.

Thirty years ago, in 1968, my parents' theater led some of the earliest feminist activism on the East coast. My mother and father wrote and directed the play "How to Make a Woman." It was a dramatization of how society shaped and limited women's lives, and the role men played in this process. The right idea at the right time, the play received rave reviews and catapulted my parents to the front lines of a relatively new initiative called the "female liberation movement." Along with others around the country, my parents helped churn ripples into a wave, the second wave of American feminism.

I remember—in a foggy, five-year-old kind of way—watching this budding of the women's movement. That's because one night something unusual happened. At first the evening seemed like any other: My parents' play ended; the actors finished bowing; the house lights came on. The mix of Boston professionals, university students and activists who had shifted, coughed and laughed in inky darkness were now, once again, visible. The church smelled of dust, sweat, stale breath.

My mother stood up, clip-board in hand, pencil behind her ear. Bits of red curly hair barely contained in a braid strained to get free. She was making an announcement, but I didn't pay attention. I was on the floor, scribbling out a crayon masterpiece.

Suddenly there was commotion. Everyone was talking, getting up from their seats, moving in different directions. Two different directions.

I looked up. The audience was doing something I hadn't seen before. All the men were going one way, into the side room, while all the women were going another way, downstairs.

I rushed up to ask: "Mom, why's half of everybody going downstairs and half of everybody staying up here?"

"Because we're going to talk, sweetie-pie," she said.

There was always lots of talking around my parents. Talking about grown-up things, in big groups, in small groups, in all kinds of groups, but never before in groups divided up this way.

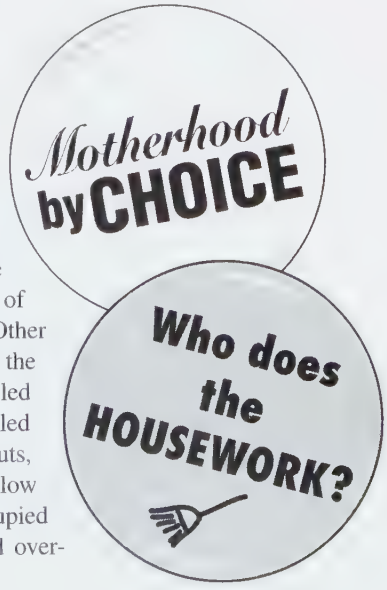
"Talking 'bout what?" I asked.

"About our different lives," she said.

Today, men's and women's discussion groups don't sound like much. In 1968, they were revolutionary. It was in these groups that women began to compare notes and organize; where they discovered that the bad things that happened to one woman happened to many; where they concluded that the most intimate, personal aspects of their lives were political. Issues like how their husbands treated them, who took care of the kids, who got attention in the bedroom, even how they felt about themselves were, in fact, political. It was an era marked by the embryonic beginning of men's and women's consciousness-raising. And, starting at age five, I was privy to hearing—night after night—groundbreaking, honest, exploratory discussions of how constricting, how oppressive, gender roles and relations were in America.

Boy, was I bored.

The theater was an interesting mix of quiet concentration and loud, constant motion. Either way, it was hard to get my parents' attention. During the performances and during the groups, the smallest peep out of me resulted in a cross Shhh! Other times the church filled with the noisy bustle of chairs being pulled together to form circles, or pulled apart and put away. Loud shouts, bells, whistles filled any hollow spaces that weren't already occupied with sprawling stage props and over-



sized puppets with enormous faces and flowing manes of straw. But all this activity was out of my reach. The adults rushing around rarely paused to look down at the little girl squatting, cowgirl style, on the large green stuffed turtle.

I made up imaginary friends, like the family of penguins that lived in my belly, or the bunnies that lived on my fingers. I could sit motionless for hours watching them play, eavesdropping on their conversations. No adult ever mentioned how strange I must have looked staring into space, talking to myself.

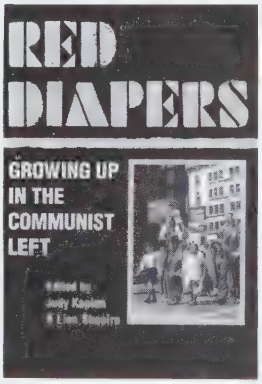
Only my patience, not our nights, ended when the performances were over. After the shows were the discussion groups. After the discussion groups my parents held meetings with the actors. Midnight, one a.m., two. The glamour of getting to stay up late had long since passed. My mom's mantra, repeated over and over each night, was *Okay, pumpkin, okay. We'll go home soon.*

Actually, home was often more of the same. For three months at a time we'd lose my father to the attic. In isolation, he endlessly wrote on a big table, growling at all who dared disturb him. Finally he'd emerge from his den of creativity, only to bring his finished script to the theater. There, we'd lose him again for another three months as he directed rehearsals and put on his play. My mother was where he wasn't: at the theater directing when he was writing, and then off somewhere writing when he was directing. Often they would co-direct, creating a near parental drought in our household.

Like everyone, I have a list of pros and cons about growing up with my particular parents. Top of the list, long working hours. And little to no pay. For my sister and me, this translated into a long succession of live-in baby-sitters who flowed in and out of our home. The result: I struggled with a childhood loneliness that was hard to shake. Besides the physical absence of my parents, another hurt I experienced was the early realization that there was no way I could compete. No matter how difficult my math homework, no matter how badly I scraped my knee, I knew I would never be as important as the struggles to which my parents committed their lives.

Plenty of activists, of course, successfully juggle both

Red-Diaper Babies: "Commie Kids" and How McCarthy Scared Them



From its founding in 1919 until 1956, when it began to unravel, the American Communist Party attracted thousands of members. Idealists all, they joined the Party seeking a better way. Lauding the Soviet Union as a model, these activists believed that it was only a matter of time before societies everywhere were transformed.

Whole families were galvanized around the needs of the Party. Many children found their parents' whirlwind of activity endlessly fascinating. Others, however, felt they were pushed to the side, and their contributions to a new anthology, *Red Diapers: Growing Up in the Communist Left* (University of Illinois Press), are filled with bitterness. While virtually all the contributors selected by editors Judy Kaplan and Linn Shapiro are proud of their parents' efforts, the sting of being ignored or belittled persists.

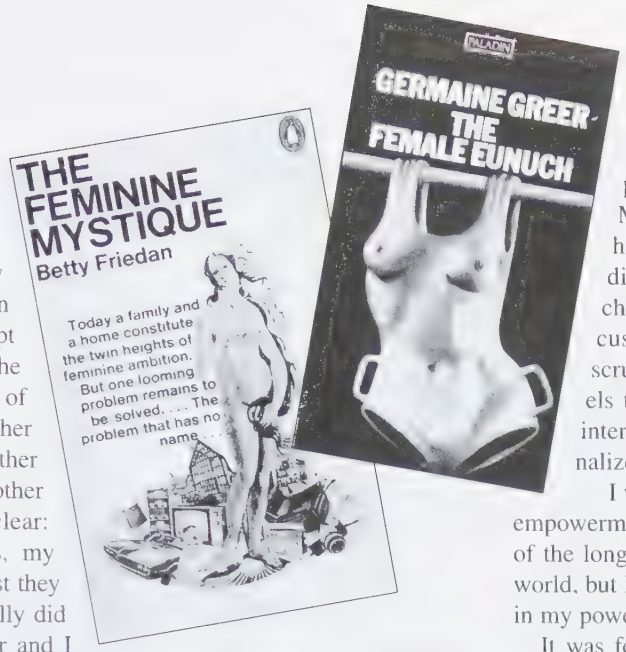
Jeff Lawson, whose screenwriter father was blacklisted in Hollywood, writes: "The communists I grew up with were politically in favor of sharing the wealth, helping the underdog, but in their personal lives were often wrapped up in themselves."

Rachel Fast Ben-Avi's entry is similarly poignant. "I am two? Three? Four? The New York Times is spread out before father and me. Father [writer Howard Fast] attacks the paper, combs it for untruths. He reads to me, explains the events of the day, points out distortions, anticommunist propaganda, outright lies. I try my best to understand. Sometimes I challenge him. 'You're not listening, Rachel,' he reprimands. 'You must listen.'"

These childhood anxieties were exacerbated by McCarthyism. Essay after essay reveals the terror that the "family secret" would be discovered. Indeed, the arrest and execution of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg hit red diaper babies with a singular intensity: "My worst nightmare was that my mother would be taken away as Morton Sobell had been from his children and the Rosenbergs had been from theirs," writes Miriam Zahler. "If the Rosenbergs were in jail because they passed out leaflets, my mother, who also passed out leaflets, might be arrested, too."

Some of the contributors write of fleeing to Mexico or Europe to evade red squad inquisitions. Others write of their struggles to retain a progressive political connection outside of the Party, while still others write of their continuing Communist affiliation despite the Party's decline. All told, *Red Diapers* runs the gamut, chronicling childhoods loved and hated, parents revered and feared, politics embraced and avoided. The book's 46 essays are lively and heartfelt. The mix brings forth an intensely moving collection of American histories.

—Eleanor J. Bader


THE FEMININE MYSTIQUE
Betty Friedan
Today a family and a home constitute the twin heights of feminine ambition. But one looming problem remains to be solved. . . . The problem that has no name . . .
PALADIN
GERMAINE GREER
THE FEMALE EUNUCH

work and family lives. And my parents did too, later. It wasn't until I turned twenty that my parents finally understood. That was when they began exploring their own childhood hurts that had kept them from connecting to the needs of their kids. The pain of an abusive, schizophrenic mother on one side. An absentee father and physically combative brother on the other. It became clear: Given their own childhoods, my parents had done the very best they could. When my parents finally did shift their priorities my sister and I were put at the top. The love, time and attention were new, and were great. It helped to make our present-day relationship one of real closeness and mutual support. My parents have become some of my best friends.

Nonetheless, I doggedly dragged my childhood hurts into adulthood. To this day I have a hard time remembering I am important to my family, friends and lovers. Sometimes I feel I have to do something spectacular to ensure a position of import in their lives. Linked to this is the (erroneous) belief that my self-worth is tied to making a difference in the world. Finally, to conclude this list of psychological baggage I carry: As if I were still that young girl at the theater, I sometimes feel I can never get enough attention or appreciation. Early deprivation left me with a constant hunger. It was this dynamic that led me, as a teen, to stay too long in an abusive relationship. At least I was *his* priority.

But even with this laundry list of complaints, I could never say the cost of being the child of activists outweighed the gains. From the earliest I can remember my parents were always full, intense human beings. They bubbled, crackled, with verve. They had ideas and they acted on them. They had energy and they used it. When they finally sat down, it was to plan their next move. They believed a person, once conscious of truths and injustices, would want to join the struggle. This led them to lead. They were always in front of groups talking, directing, teaching—initiating action.

When I was a child, I had no doubt that my parents had special powers. What they said, people did. When they said the theater lights should go down, they went down. When they told large groups to pull their chairs into a circle and talk, a circle was formed and people talked. I saw my parents leading all the time. I was sure whatever they set out to do, it would be done. With my parents around I was certain: the oppression of women would be long gone by the time I was grown up—say by 1974, when I'd be 12.

Much of their leadership was in the fight for women's and men's liberation. And they didn't just profess this dogma. My mother did half the play-writing, half the directing. My father did half the cooking, half the housework. My mother discussed politics while she changed the car oil. My father discussed his feelings while he scrubbed the toilet. What role models to grow up with! What ideals to internalize as a child! And I did internalize them, very early on.

I was a girl with a distinct sense of empowerment. Not only was I keenly aware of the long list of oppressed peoples in the world, but I was also aware that it was within my power to act and change things.

It was feminism that I embraced when I was a child. Growing up in my family, I experienced a perplexing dichotomy—a world steeped in the idealism of second-wave feminism yet still filled with the realities of every day sexism. This keen awareness of what should be versus what actually was helped prompt me to decide, at age ten, that I was not just the daughter of feminist leaders but a girl-feminist in my own right. I passed around Ms. Magazine and *Our Bodies Ourselves,* lectured fellow students and teachers about language (firefighters, not firemen!), and enrolled my best friend of fifth grade—who was being abused at home—in a self defense course for women (at the time, this was the cutting edge thing in the women's movement). And as I grew, my activism did too; as a young adult I founded an organization aimed at ending sexist/racist imagery in the media, lead workshops on female empowerment and organized training sessions on dismantling all isms.

I was certain the oppression of women would be gone by the time I was grown up—say by 1974, when I'd be 12.

Well, it is now thirty years since those early consciousness-raising groups in Harvard Square and unfortunately, there is still plenty of sexism in our society. So, I continue to bear the torch my parents carried. As a feminist writer I focus on the details of women's and girls' lives. Was I turned off to activism because as a child my driven, Jewish parents were too busy to pay attention to me? No. I was able to separate their activism from their parenting skills, mostly because of the obviousness of the work that needed to be done. This holds true for my sister too, who is now a leader in wildlife conservation. It wasn't even that I rejected activism and then decided to come back to it. I grew up breathing activism. *Tikkun olam*—repair of the world—permeated the air in my childhood. To breath anything else would seem foreign. ■

Rivka Solomon (a pen name) is seeking stories for her book That Takes Ovaries! *Send via email (redelson@gis.net) up to 1,000 words of anything you've done that was gutsy, audacious, brazen. Include address and phone.*

Fighting Fascism

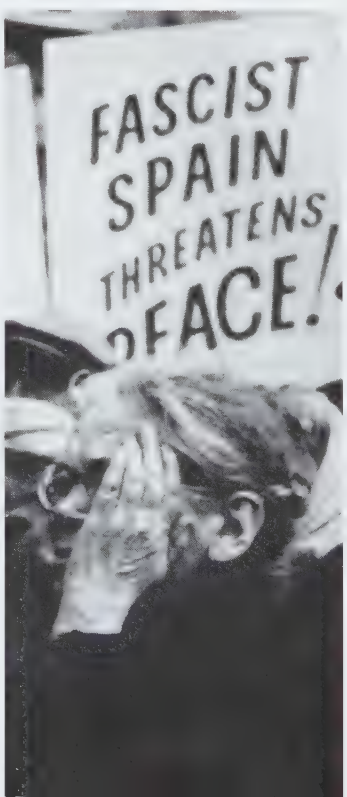
60 years later, we're retrieving the hidden history of American Jewish women in the Spanish Civil War

ABRAHAM LINCOLN BRIGADE ARCHIVE

by Ian Halpern

Say the words "Spanish Civil War" and "Abraham Lincoln Brigade" and the responses are mixed. Some raise an eyebrow and wonder, "Spanish-*American* War?" Others, better informed, think "Ernest Hemingway." And a small group of fellow-travelers quickly rewind to 1936, when the fascist uprising in Spain spurred a deeply bonded community of left-wing Americans to put aside the comforts of home in favor of foxholes in the century's first confrontation with fascism.

Even among those insiders, many are unaware of the nearly 100 women—half of them Jewish—who faced war abroad and political ostracism back home to join in the defense of Spanish democracy. These were women who, in the decades between the two world wars, crossed the Atlantic to fight, organize supply lines, tend to the wounded and report for the press on the battles of the war. These women made the political personal decades before the phrase became a feminist rallying cry.



Sixty years ago, the last of these American women returned to the U.S. Their efforts raised the country's awareness of fascism and helped slow its advance across Europe. The volunteers also continued a legacy of progressive activism within the Jewish community that for many presaged a lifetime of commitment to social justice. Their stories are an important part of our history.

Yet their efforts remain virtually absent from the Jewish-American record. The National Museum of American Jewish History in Philadelphia has no mention of the Spanish Civil War in its permanent exhibit; neither does the National Museum of American Jewish Military History. None of the women inducted into the National Women's Hall of Fame, in Seneca Falls,

ABRAHAM LINCOLN BRIGADE ARCHIVE/BRANDEIS UNIVERSITY

New York, were among those who volunteered to fight in Spain.

Cold War anti-communist rhetoric has done much to erase their efforts from history. Old-fashioned male chauvinism has done more. Even today, a decade after the Cold War was "won," Spanish Civil War veterans are burdened by detractors who link their service to Soviet-style communism and the excesses of Stalin. At a time when Americans embrace war epics like Steven Spielberg's "Saving Private Ryan" and explore unsung heroes of the American Civil Rights movement, the story of Spanish Civil War vets remain at the periphery of American popular history. In the British Isles alone there are more than 40 monuments paying tribute to the international volunteers. Here, in contrast, there is one lone sculpture in Seattle, dedicated in October.

Progressive women saw Franco's fascism as a grave threat.

Why Did Women Go to War?

The Spanish Civil War erupted on July 18, 1936, after right-wing officers, led by General Francisco Franco, attempted to supplant Spain's democratically elected, left-leaning government with a fascist dictatorship. Western powers pledged neutrality and embargoed military aid. Hitler seized the opportunity to test his rebuilt military machine. Along with Benito Mussolini, Hitler provided military and tactical support to Franco. Out-gunned and stymied by political infighting, Madrid fell, nearly three years later, in the spring of 1939.

Thousands of women and men on the American left—socialists, communists and anti-fascists—fought against the isolationism America had embraced. The United States was suffering from "a spiritual fatigue" and "a lack of moral stamina [and] of faith in the principles of democracy," writes historian Robert Murray in *Red Scare*. Fascism was gaining currency. On April 20, 1935, pro-fascist Los Angelenos openly celebrated Adolf Hitler's birthday, and later that year 22,000 supporters marched into Madison Square Garden to support his regime. Throughout the decade, Father Charles Caughlin promoted anti-Semitism, fascism and "America for Americans" on his popular radio program.

ABRAHAM LINCOLN BRIGADE ARCHIVE

Ruth Davidow in front of a bullet-ridden ambulance.

The women who fought for Spanish democracy were "trying to make the world more fair, to create a society that was more just than any society that had ever been," says Julia Newman, project director for a documentary, "Their Cause Was Liberty: American Women in the Spanish Civil War."

When news of the fascist uprising in Spain first circulated in urban immigrant communities like Brooklyn, San Francisco and Chicago's Hyde Park, young progressive women living in these communities were galvanized. They saw Franco's fascism as a grave threat. They also saw Spain—in optimistic socialist terms—as a historic opportunity to replace old hierarchies with a new, equitable society. For many Jews, abiding American neutrality was not an option.

"The fascist movement was not just isolated in Europe," recalls **Virginia Malbin,** a Jewish social worker from Chicago and Spanish Civil War volunteer, about the threat she felt even on America's neutral shores. "Between what was happening at home and what was happening abroad, many of us made it our business to be as active politically as we could be to struggle against fascism in any way we could."

The small minority concerned about the threat used whatever means at their disposal to respond. Dorothy Parker, Virginia Woolf, Nancy Cunard, Edna St. Vincent Millay and Martha Gellhorn wrote about the injustice of fascism in Spain. Garment workers in New York City bought ambulances to help the Spanish Republic's wounded. Cigar workers in Florida and their families donated portions of their weekly wages to Republican Spain. Anti-fascist groups held dances to raise money. Thousands of women contributed time, energy and money without ever leaving the U.S.

For many Jewish women, the Communist Party offered them opportunities to react aggressively to the fascist threat. At least in theory, Party ideology promoted gender equality, and women were recruited to participate in the defense of Spain. The volunteers talked about Spain in clandestine Young Communist League discussion groups open to women and men. Early in the war, the Party's official paper, the Daily Worker, a must-read in tens of thousands

of homes, ran an appeal from Dolores Iburruri, a key Spanish leader known as La Pasionaria, aimed at female volunteers: "Friends, sisters, the International Antifascist Solidarity asks you through me as a woman and a mother, as a fighter in this struggle, for your support."

Volunteer Evelyn Hutchins, at right, was a dancer-turned-truck driver from Washington State.

For Jewish American women intent on going to Spain, the Communist Party was the expedient way of getting there. The Roosevelt administration in 1937 outlawed military aid to Spain and frowned upon most efforts to support the democracy. Mainstream political organizations were loath to run headlong into U.S. policy.

The Party, on the other hand, fostered the idea of a "popular front" against fascism. It was the only political organization to mobilize, recruit and send volunteers to Spain on a national level, contributing the 2,800-man Abraham Lincoln Battalion to the 40,000-person International Brigade that gathered fighters from 52 countries to defend the Spanish Republic.

The Party also paid for the passage of 150 medical personnel through the American Medical Bureau to Aid Spanish Democracy. Among them were about 60 women: one doctor, 48 nurses, two lab technicians, two ambulance drivers, two translators/administrators, and a handful of social workers, according to records kept by the Veterans of Abraham Lincoln Brigades in New York. Most of these women came from urban centers with large immigrant populations and vibrant Jewish communities. The women didn't have children, most were unmarried and almost all were college-educated.

Volunteers like **Ruth Davidow** found it difficult to balance their domestic social activism against the need to fight fascism in Spain. To go to Spain meant leaving behind the labor organizing efforts, rent strikes and political activity that defined many volunteers' lives. At first, Davidow didn't jump at the chance to go.

"Everyone was saying to me, 'God, if I were a nurse, I'd be going already,'" remembers Davidow. "These were the kind of people I was going around with. They were supporting Spanish democracy before I did. I came to it because I believed it was absolutely essential. But it took a number of months and quite a lot of soul-searching on my part, quite a lot of agony [but] I realized that fascism wasn't going to stand still."

In the male-dominated culture of war, the men were well-intentioned, lovable chauvinists.

How'd They Get so Tough?

At a moment when women's work still relegated them to the domestic sphere, these volunteers rejected the domestic patterns of their day by seeking higher education, taking a career and asserting their own priorities. Like many volunteers, **Clara Leight**, a Russian-born Jewish nurse, received support and encouragement from her family. In Leight's single-parent family, her mother used a book of 16th-century Yiddish folktales to counsel her daughters and, later, her granddaughters to be cognizant of the people in their communities, Leight's niece, Gloria Sharfin, recalls. Leight's family included many suffragettes, labor organizers and leaders of tenant councils. "There was always activism, there was no choice," Sharfin says.

"My mother took us to the picket lines when we were four," Davidow says about her early activist models. Her mother, Maria Davidow, was a popular organizer and negotiator among immigrant laborers in New York's and San Francisco's garment districts. She was also stubborn. "One day after haggling with management," Davidow recalls, "the shop owner calls my mother in and says: 'I get so mad at you that sometimes I'd like to throw you down the stairs.' ... I am my mother's daughter," Davidow concludes with satisfaction.

Like many volunteers, Davidow's first activism was born out of Depression-era need. "We had a house where during the days when there was no food, my mother fed all the kids [in the neighborhood], put another potato in the pot. I mean there was no time we weren't concerned about the communities we were in." Before serving in Spain, Davidow worked with tenant committees to prevent landlords from evicting destitute tenants.

Malbin, who shipped off to Spain with the Medical Bureau, got her first taste of politics in a working-class neighborhood on the south side of Chicago. As a student on scholarship at the University of Chicago in the early 1930s, Malbin was dismayed by the poor facilities allocated for black students and by poverty in the surrounding community. "We picketed and protested the

university's [discriminatory] housing policy and our names made it on to the local Red Squad lists of people to be watched," she said, referring to the police practice of placing supposed radicals under surveillance.

Sexism Got in their Way

Spain provided a host of challenges for the American women who volunteered. For starters, like their male counterparts, they would be required to work closely with Spanish loyalists, few volunteers spoke Spanish and almost none of them had any wartime experience. The women volunteers faced an added difficulty: the male-dominated culture of war both in the regional committees charged with selecting American volunteers and in their compatriots in Spain.

"A lot of [male] veterans gave lip service to egalitarianism but their [attention] just wasn't there. They're well intentioned, lovable, but chauvinist nonetheless," says Abraham Lincoln Brigade documentarian Judy Montel.

Evelyn Hutchins, a dancer-turned-truck driver from Washington State, faced this machismo before ever setting foot in Spain. Like many would-be volunteers, Hutchins underwent a clandestine interview with a regional Communist recruitment committee. Because resources were scarce, volunteers were selected in order of greatest utility—men with military experience and medical personnel first, followed by truck drivers, then construction workers.

"She applied and they turned her down because they had no experience having any [female] truck drivers, and they were just plain against it," recalls Moe Fishman, a Civil War veteran and friend of Hutchins. "She kept nagging the committee—I think it took more than one visit—and told them on no uncertain terms that she was as good if not better then any of those that had been recruited."

To prove it, Hutchins said she would take them back to her house where she would break down her truck and put it back together. "The committee went with her and she broke the damn thing down and put it back together again," Fishman says. Hutchins was approved and was on her way to Spain. Several dozen other women, unable to find sponsorship, entered Spain independently by sneaking in from France in a two-day hike over the Pyrenees or stowing away on Spain-bound cargo ships.

The first American medical team, led by Dr. Edward Barsky and **Fredericka Martin**, a Jewish woman and the Medical Bureau's head nurse, arrived in Spain in February 1937, two days before American military volunteers, members of the Abraham Lincoln Battalion, saw combat for the first time. Within 48 hours of their arrival, their newly established schoolhouse-turned-hospital faced a deluge of shattered soldiers wounded at the Jamara front.

In Spain, the American women were charged with establishing, fortifying and maintaining eight hospitals and a bevy of first-aid field stations on the front lines. In the hospitals, nurses, administrators and translators spent the bulk

The Road After Spain

In the years after the war, the women who volunteered continued their humanitarian efforts in other areas. Clara Leight joined the U.S. Army and was stationed at a hospital in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, during World War II. In Alabama, white soldiers ate first in the cafeteria, while the black soldiers waited. This was just the way it was, Leight told a relative. Accustomed to the interracial fighting force of the Abraham Lincoln Battalion, Leight was appalled. One day, when the lunch bell rang, Leight wheeled in two black soldiers with the white soldiers. The Army threatened to court-martial her. Instead, supervisors gave Leight the option of nursing on a soon-to-be opened second front in Europe. Less than four years after Spain, Leight found herself steaming back to Europe for a rematch against fascism on the eve of D-Day.

Clara Leight, who integrated army lunches.

From the 1950s to 1970s, Ruth Davidow worked as a nurse in Cuba, led students to Mississippi to register black voters, and worked to organize California migrant workers. In the 1980s Davidow's daughter, a documentary filmmaker, urged her to use film as a medium of protest. As a filmmaker, Ruth Davidow went on to document the women's movements in Beijing, the Cuban Revolution and, recently, Boris Yeltsin's defense of the fledgling Russian democracy. Now 87, Davidow lives in San Francisco and has recently completed a documentary about the fall of the Soviet Union and about her brother, Michael Davidow, a Russian-based journalist and Communist activist.

—IH

of their 14-hour days training Spanish women to perform basic medical tasks, rationing medical supplies and husbanding foodstuffs, all of which were in short supply. They wrote letters back to the States with requests for gauze, cots, wool blankets and hypodermic needles. Hutchins, one of only two female ambulance drivers in Spain, worked with Davidow out of an auto-chir, a converted truck-turned-mobile-hospital, throughout much of 1938.

"We are going to need iron-lined guts for this job, all right."

"The town where we had our first front hospital was bombed every day—and such bombing I had never seen," wrote Barsky to a letter to supporters in New York City. "One day from 10 A.M. to 4 in the afternoon, planes were overhead all the time going through all maneuvers and dropping bombs about us and diving down to machine gun us. When we weren't working, we stood about—ready to dive into the trench—trying to measure whether we were just beyond bomb-range or not."

In another letter, Martin described the wounded: "At a neurological hospital I saw many cases sent back from the front. A mass of injuries, fractures, and shrapnel wounds, etc. The combination is terrible. We are going to need iron-lined guts for this job all right."

In the autumn of 1938, near the end of their Spanish Civil War service, the women helped evacuate wounded International Brigade volunteers in a series of hasty retreats across the Ebro River in northern Spain. Retreating international volunteers were constant targets for fascism bombers.

As fighters planes prowled the Spanish skies, Davidow bit down on a stick to protect her eardrums from the exploding bombs. Hiding out in a dank cave, she sat listening to the moans of wounded soldiers and waited for the aerial bombardment to end.

"All I was thinking was, 'How soon are these guys going to stop so we can get the ambulances running,'" Davidow recalls. "In the bombing you faced your own mortality but by concentrating on what you were doing you overcame it. We really had a purpose and the purpose was so strong it overcame the fear. I had no miracle, [no] way of dealing with it otherwise. I just knew I had to do it," she said.

McCarthy's Thank-You

Like Vietnam veterans thirty years later, Americans returned from Spain to a hostile homecoming. A FBI file marked P.A.F.—Premature Anti-Fascist—greeted each returning Spanish volunteer. Though the Roosevelt administration was increasingly aware of the need to confront fascism by early 1939, Spanish Civil War veterans were suspect due to the "premature" nature of their anti-fascism. "You had to be careful who you told," said Clara Leight, who paid her own way to Spain and served as a nurse in the Medical Bureau.

More than a decade later, veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade found themselves atop Senator Joseph McCarthy's House Committee on Un-American Activities. In the lexicon of mid-century Cold War rhetoric, if you had been in Spain or sympathetic to Spain, then you were either a Communist or sympathetic to communism. Such a designation could ruin a nurse's career or blacklist a doctor.

Even late into the 1950s, officials at a Westchester, NY, hospital where Leight worked threatened to fire her after they

ABRAHAM LINCOLN BRIGADE ARCHIVE/BRANDEIS UNIVERSITY

International Brigade members advancing.

found out about her Spanish Civil War service, recalls, Gary Sharfin, her great-nephew. At the last moment, an administrator whom Leight had befriended after she corrected the misdiagnosis of his child's illness intervened to prevent Leight's dismissal, Sharfin says.

"There was an atmosphere of real anxiety around the House Committee on Un-American Activities," recalls Julia Newman, who grew up in the 1950s surrounded by leftist activist and Spanish Civil War veterans. Though her parents had not served in Spain, they supported the effort and were close to many returning New York volunteers. This association made Newman's family suspect as Communists or sympathizers. There was "a kind of oppressive atmosphere about left-wing political thinking that [today] is hard to understand," Newman notes. "The atmosphere was malevolent," she says, and many people whom fought in Spain often had their houses watched and cars tailed. Newman's mother threw away books by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels while moving apartments in the late 1950s in fear that the movers might spot books in transit.

The intensity of the anti-communist rhetoric and red-baiting that washed over the United States between the 1930s and 1960s created an inhospitable environment for the American women who served in Spain. Given the vitriolic nature of red-baiting following the Second World War "there should be little wonder why" the volunteers' stories weren't openly discussed or widely disseminated, says Cary Nelson, a Spanish Civil War scholar at the University of Illinois and co-editor of *Madrid 1937*, a collection of letters from American volunteers in Spain. However, with the last women survivors now in their 80s, a handful of scholars, documentary filmmakers, archivists and others have devoted themselves to recording the hidden histories.

In her documentary film slated for completion this year, Newman, eager to distance the volunteers' effort from communist taint, has airbrushed Spanish Civil War posters to remove the hammer and sickle. Though this editorial decision may blur the line between history and public relations, "people do get a knee-jerk reaction to [these] symbols," Newman says. The word "communist" and the hammer and sickle have been used to dismiss the efforts of the women, who served in Spain, she adds.

For a collection of scholars, journalists, filmmakers and a dwindling number of left-wing activists, the Abraham Lincoln Brigade and the women who served in Spain are powerful and inspirational reminders that injustice can be challenged. At the same time, their very history is a story of another injustice: the injustice of their omission from the historical record of the anti-fascist effort.

"They did everything they could to get to a place where they could contribute to the righting of a wrong. They took it personally. It's not a very contemporary way of thinking," Julia Newman says, "but I think it should be." ■

Ian Halpern is a financial reporter and freelance writer living in Washington, D.C.

For More Information...

about the women who went, or to contribute materials

UPI

American volunteers in France en route to Spain.

- Julia Newman, project director for **"Their Cause Was Liberty: American Women in the Spanish Civil War,"** can be reached by fax: (212) 866-3815. The documentary film will be the first to focus exclusively on American women who fought in Spain and explores the changing roles and expectations of American women during the 1930s.

- **The Veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade** and The Abraham Lincoln Brigade Archives offer books, films and videos, including "Forever Activists," a documentary by Judy Montel about American Spanish Civil War veterans and their activism before and after Spain. The VALB can provide information about "Shouts From The Wall," a traveling poster exhibit slated for Zoellner Art Gallery at Lehigh University in Pennsylvania, April 7-June 6 and "The Aura Of The Cause" photography exhibit. VALB, 799 Broadway, Rm 227, New York, New York 10003; (212) 674-5552; www.alba-valb.org

- Brandeis University's extensive **Spanish Civil War Collection includes** photographs, oral histories, correspondence, interviews, 5,000 books and pamphlets, several hundred propaganda posters, the Fredericka Martin Collection on American doctors and nurses who served and more. Hours are by appointment. (781) 736-4688; www.library.brandeis.edu/spcoll/spcvwr.html

Cookies

Ina is breaking her first diet.

She's walking up Nostrand Avenue on her way home from school. She's spent her carfare on sweets, so she's hurrying, trying to jog along nearly as fast as the bus. Meanwhile she's stuffing candy in her mouth, feeling guilty and driven as well as half-starved. There's a trail of silver paper behind her on the sidewalk, and malted milk duds are falling through her shaky fingers into the gutter. She doesn't stoop to pick them up. She's fallen low, but not that low.

Edna has put Ina on something called the Josephine Lowman Nine-Day Diet, which she cut out of the New York Post. Ina is only eleven but she wears size 13, the largest size there is. She's now taller than all the other girls in the seventh grade and at the rate she's going she'll soon be the biggest teenager in the free world. She'll also have the biggest breasts—she's already a B cup.

When Ina came out of the Avalon with her parents last Saturday night, pretending she was Ava Gardner, a grownup man lurched toward her in the lobby, and Edna grabbed her wrist. "If I ever see you staring at a man that way . . . . " Sol looked at Ina sadly, and she's still confused about what had happened. Ina knows she wasn't staring at anyone in particular, but imagines it must have something to do with her breasts, which stick out so presumptuously. She's already heard loud wolf whistles on the post office steps, whistles that filled her with delirious joy.

If she loses weight, she thinks, she'll look more like a fashion model and less like the prostitute she undoubtedly will soon become.

Ina's diet works. Each day's menu is printed in the newspaper. She eats only what's printed and in nine days she loses five pounds. Ina feels grateful to Josephine Lowman, whoever she is. Then Edna suggests that Ina try for ten pounds, so Ina starts the whole cycle again; Edna's saved the newspaper clippings. This time Ina is promised something extra as a reward—a baggy, all-covering crew-neck sweater.

Edna is perhaps unduly conscious of breasts. Hers are enormous. She wears bras like girdles with five hooks down the back and little puffs of lambs wool under the straps to ease the pressure on her shoulders. Whenever Edna takes a photo, she stands sideways holding her pocketbook in front of her, or else sits down behind a vase of flowers.

On her way to school at eight in the morning, Ina is already hungry. In the basement lunchroom she opens the meal that Edna has prepared. She'd risen early to chop radishes and green peppers and mix them into a container of fat-free cottage cheese. She'd wrapped it all up in a pretty flowered paper napkin—which Ina can't eat—along with a plastic spoon. In the thermos is some bluish skim milk. Ina forgets that she wants to be a flat-chested size 9 and that she wants her mother to love her. She thinks about taking the pennies out of her penny loafers to buy a chocolate mint.

Although she's sinned mostly in thought, at the end of the second nine days Ina has lost only two measly pounds. Edna isn't discouraged. One more cycle, she promises, and we'll hit the ten pound jackpot. Okay, Ina says, without making a fuss. I'll do it.

Ina never makes a fuss. She always seems to be thinking about something else when her own fate is being decided.

Before long Ina is getting up in the middle of the night and sneaking down to the kitchen for some peanut butter. Heart pounding as she eases open the cupboard, she hastily licks the spoon and hides it in the back of a drawer.

A few days later she takes the money for a library fine and squanders it on a dripping slice of pizza. Worst of all, she abandons the library books, like an unwanted baby, on the floor of a telephone booth. By the twenty-seventh day, after diligent stuffing, Ina has gained back four pounds for a net loss of three pounds.

Scarlet-faced, Ina swears that she's never broken her diet—no, not even once.

During the following argument, Sol, who is away most of the time in his linen supply business, appears to learn about the diet for the first time.

"Diet? Who needs a diet? She looks good the way she is," he proclaims. He wonders why Edna is so angry.

Edna returns Ina to regular family rations. No more poached egg white on protein bread, thank God. She also installs a lock on the kitchen cabinet holding the bread, cereals and the peanut butter. Without a diet, she says, she is afraid of what Ina will become.

Now something thrilling happens in the family. An Israeli

BY SONDRA SPATT OLSEN

HER MOTHER LOVED FRESH FLOWERS BY LYNNE FELDMAN

girl, a distant relative, is coming to America for a heart operation. Nineteen-year-old Lenka, Ina's second cousin once removed, will live with the family for several months.

Edna makes elaborate preparations for Lenka. Whenever Ina arrives home from school, she finds her mother cleaning and polishing, shifting furniture, upgrading every possible household article, hand towels, napkin rings, magazine rack.

When Lenka finally appears on the dock of the Greek Line, Ina is disappointed. Her second cousin once removed is only a tiny mouse of a girl, pale and unresponsive. Her intense mouse-eyed stare makes Ina uneasy.

"My only surviving relative," Edna says proudly, though it's not really true. Jenka, Lenka's mother is alive in Haifa. And of course there are a few other relatives who left Europe before Hitler arrived. Lenka is quickly whisked off to the hospital, where Ina is too young to visit. After surgery, Edna devotedly visits Lenka every day, carrying, in empty cottage cheese containers, special tidbits she's cooked.

When Lenka finally returns to the Ziff household, she's no longer wan and washed out but bright and vivacious. Although she looks delicate with her little cherry mouth and translucent complexion, she's a powerhouse of energy, greedily cramming a lifetime of pleasure into her few weeks in New York.

While Ina is in school, Edna and Lenka go sightseeing: They catch the show at the Radio City Music Hall and climb the steps of the Statue of Liberty. They go off to downtown Brooklyn, to Fulton Street, where Edna buys Lenka a new outfit—a dainty silk organza dress with puffed sleeves and a sweetheart neckline. It's size 3 and has a swooping ruffled hemline. Lenka also buys ballerina shoes with ankle straps, nylons, and a narrow black velvet ribbon to wear around her neck. She tries on her clothes in front of the full-length mirror. Boxes and tissue paper litter the room. While Lenka twirls, Ina stands nearby like a fence post. "Terrific!" Edna says, eyes gleaming.

Later on, Edna comes into Ina's room while she's finishing her Social Studies. "I'm completely knocked out. She dragged me all over Fulton Street, Namm's, Loeser's, A. & S., the whole shooting match. Did you see the stuff she picked out?"

Ina nods.

"Nice, but don't you think she has a bit of *goyische* taste? Still, it's a pleasure to shop with someone so easy to please."

While Lenka and Edna are gadding about, Ina spends more time with Sol. She has to give him supper while the two are off seeing a Broadway show. Instead of reading The Post while he gulps his food, Sol talks to Ina, inquiring after her schoolwork. "I don't always ask because I know you're doing well," he says. In the same spirit Ina asks after the linen supply.

Lenka and Edna go to Washington for the weekend. Ina will get her turn during Easter vacation. On Saturday Ina gives herself a treat of her own—a trip to the Grand Army Plaza branch of the Brooklyn Public Library. In the handsome reading room and the space of an hour or two, she devours a sexy forbidden book by Pearl S. Buck about a concubine.

"Actually, it was boring," Edna reports when she returns home from Washington. "I only ran here and there for Lenka's sake."

Soon Lenka grows more annoying. Her incomprehensible chatter, her sharp little nose, her high squeaky voice, her small, always-moving mouth enrage Ina. Their exchanges

If she loses weight, she'll look more like a model and less like the prostitute she undoubtedly will become.

Edna gives Ina one cookie while it's still warm, the chocolate bits melting lusciously.

never lead anywhere because Lenka speaks so little English.

"You go to the Freak Museum?" Lenka asks.

"Freaks? Coney Island, you mean? You want to go to the boardwalk?"

"No, Freak Museum." She jabs a skinny finger at Ina's chest. "Artist."

Ina won't learn about the existence of The Frick Collection until she is grown up.

A few days before her departure, an unexpected check arrives from Jenka, and Lenka's out on a final buying orgy: more nylons, Woolworth knickknacks, lipsticks, earrings. She's learned to take the Avenue R bus to Kings Highway and disappears for whole mornings by herself. One day she comes home with a fancy box of Barton's chocolate. Again Ina hears words of adulterated praise from Edna.

"She could offer to share the candy," Edna says with a frown. "She's been eating our food night and day." The truth is, Lenka eats far more than Ina—whole quarts of chocolate ice cream, for instance, but she doesn't appear to have gained an ounce. She's always moving. Her trim hips sway fetchingly as she ascends the staircase with the candy. She'll loll on the four poster bed that takes up most of the guest room. With her feet up on the white snowflake comforter, she'll eat her way through truffles, chocolate cherries, coconut kisses, caramel creams.

Another thing upsets Edna: Lenka hasn't brought a house gift. The day before she leaves, Lenka produces a hideous purple china peacock to put on top of the piano.

Although the bird is the height of *goyische* taste, Edna is appeased. She bakes a batch of Toll House cookies for Lenka's final snack. Most of the cookies go into a tin for Lenka to eat at her leisure on the boat. Edna gives Ina one while it's still warm, the chocolate bits melting lusciously. Lenka herself takes the remaining cookies upstairs to her room on a willow-ware plate covered by a napkin. She places them carefully on her bureau, then goes downstairs to watch TV with Edna.

While Sol snores in the bedroom, Ina drifts into Lenka's room before going to bed, homing in on the Toll House cookies.

After staring at the plate and lifting the napkin, she wanders over to the closet to take a last look at Lenka's pink organza dress—it will be packed first thing in the morning. When she glances at herself in the oval mirror, the face above her white terrycloth bathrobe has a funny, pinched look.

Quickly she snatches one small chipped cookie and rushes back to her room to munch it. Then she returns for a larger, perfect cookie and stands by the bureau dreamily ingesting it. These cookies seem crisper than the one she was given. She selects another large cookie. After successfully rearranging the whole pile for greater bulk, she eats it. Then she takes another large one and eats it.

When Ina takes a second look, she sees that she may have gone too far. The pile looks shrunken. She may be able to get away with it, though. A person who can eat an entire box of Barton's chocolate by herself and consume whole quarts of ice cream is not going to have much feeling for the slight calibrations in a pile of cookies. Ina brushes her teeth, gets into bed and turns out the light.

After several minutes of restless tossing, she realizes that she is still starving. She sneaks back into Lenka's room, grabs a cookie at random and nibbles it neatly around the edges. When it is a normal-looking albeit much smaller cookie, she replaces it. Then she tiptoes back to her room, closes the door, and falls into a light, troubled sleep.

In the middle of the night as Ina is dreaming dark vengeful dreams, her door opens quietly. As her eyes fly open, she sees Lenka's slender figure in the light from the hallway. She is carrying a plate. Ina quickly shuts her eyes and breathes deeply. Lenka places the plate on Ina's bedside table and tiptoes out.

As soon as Ina is alone, she reaches out to examine the plate, although she already knows what it is.

She is filled with deep humiliation and hatred.

So she has contaminated Lenka's cookies. Lenka will not eat what Ina has defiled. Ina feels like jumping out of bed and flinging them back in her face.

In a few moments, however, the smell of cookies begins to soothe her. As she lies back on her pillow, holding the plate on her breast, she devours the whole pile, down to the last little grainy crumb. They are very delicious. She feels tranquil as she puts down the plate and drops into a deep sleep.

When she awakes at dawn, the plate is gone.

At the breakfast table, Ina examines Lenka face closely. She is her usual vivacious, insensitive self. Her eyes give no hint of midnight happenings. It was all a dream, Ina pretends.

After Lenka left town, Edna was depressed and bored, so she took a trip to the mountains. When she turned the spotlight of her attention back on Ina, everything had changed. Elected editor of the school magazine, Ina was busy choosing her staff and convening meetings. Cookies were the last thing on her mind. Ina felt she'd been lucky to live for a time neglected in her own home.

The family heard little of Lenka after her return to Israel. She became a nurse and married a pediatrician. According to Edna, she is unfailingly kind to her mother and has two handsome sons. She has also become extremely stout. ■

Sondra Spatt Olsen's first book, Traps, *won the Iowa Short Fiction Award. She lives in Manhattan, where she is at work on a collection about a Jewish family in Brooklyn.*

LAURIE DOUGLAS

The Yoke

by Lisa Bernstein (Lisa B)

Somebody's yoke around my neck—
how can I think about God now
and what a kvetch he became in Genesis?

He walked there calling for Adam.
Then the verses fell down like a ladder on the dirt
smashing all that had been planted.
Adam stopped to be yelled at

but the actual Adam was off somewhere else
dancing and fornicating with Eve.

About all the pain and suffering that followed—
was it worth the neat rows of vegetables,
each with a picture-name?

I'm more interested in the snake in the dust
and the shimmering pyramids.
The goddess that came before them
shaking her stiff serpent at the tree.

I'm as tired of the One Dad God as he was with his
trying children.
Let the cypresses be trees in my hungry city,
let the dusty roads be my littered streets.
God, this agreement to plow and to plead—
it's enough already, don't you think?
And this yoke—take it.
Go on without me
rearranging yourself, green into red
into blue. I feel better already.
I forgive you too.

Post Pinochet

Jewish Women Lead Rights Battles in South America

BY EDNA AIZENBERG

in memory of Susy Kreiman, killed in the bombing

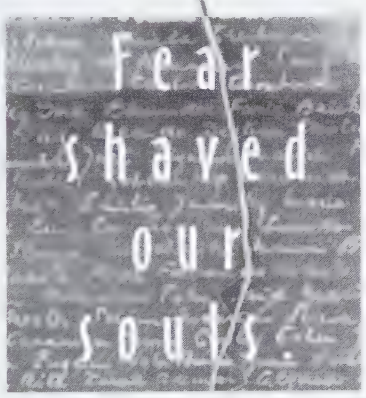
On July 18, 1994, at 9:50 am, a powerful bomb blew up a square block in downtown Buenos Aires. The immediate objective of the explosion was the Asociación Mutual Israelita Argentina, the AMIA, a building housing most of Argentina's major Jewish organizations. Despite its primary intention to murder Jews and burn Jewish property, the bomb did not discriminate: Jews and non-Jews, some one hundred of them, were killed that day, and apartment houses, schools, and stores in the area were destroyed. Images of the block on Pasteur Street where the AMIA stood resembled cities like Sarajevo or Beirut or Kosovo, a city's guts ripped out by ethnic violence.

The bomb that exploded at the AMIA is painful testimony to the fact that Argentina, like many other Latin American countries, is yet to cohere a pluralistic national polity. Despite its *manias de superioridad*, its European airs, with Buenos Aires styled the Paris of the South, Argentina is painfully Latin American, still struggling with issues of human rights, diversity, equality for peoples of varying social, religious, and ethnic backgrounds, of different sexual orientations. The

"The Echo of Memory," pictured above, was painted by Alicia Messing in memory of those killed in the AMIA bombing. It contains the names of those killed, and is cut in two by a crack, representing the two buildings that were bombed.

mask of Europeanness Argentina wears not only erases the existence of indigenous and mestizo peoples, degradingly called *cabecitas negras*, blackheads, but also the presence of non-European immigrants, such as Afro-Asian Sephardic Jews and Arabs. For instance, the current president, Carlos Saul Menem, is the son of Muslim-Syrian immigrants; he had to convert to Catholicism in order to run for the presidency. The mask of Europeanness further erases the divergence among so-called Europeans; not all descendants of Europeans have similar clout.

Most of Argentina's 200,000 Jews, the largest community in Latin America, are of Yiddish-speaking Eastern European stock, but Steimberg or Aizenberg do not have the same weight as Rodriguez or Borges, nor do their cultural-linguistic heritages. Argentine-Jewish writers, among them many women like Siliva Plager, Manuela Fingueret, Reina Roffe, Alicia Steimberg, and Ana Maria Shua caustically take on this linguistic and onomastic bigotry in some of their best works, Here is Steimberg from her award-winning novel, *Cuando digo Magdalena (When I say Magdalena)*: "Remember how Borges used to say that he would speak to one grandmother in one way and to another grandmother in another way, and that those two ways of speaking were called Spanish and English? [the author Jorge Luis Borges had an English immigrant grandmother.] Well, something similar happened to me, except that in my case one way of speaking was Spanish and the other Yiddish. But since Yiddish sounded harsh and unpleasant to me, I refused to speak it. It was a mysterious language that could reveal to me who I really was. From childhood I was expected to hide, to cover up, who I 'really' was and to pretend that I was someone else, who, strangely, I also was." Her Magdalena is a marginal being, with a Jewish and womanly identity so questioned that even her name is unstable: "When I say Magdalena"; it's just a provisional name.



Shua gives an analogously tragicomic picture in her *Libro de los recuerdos*, recently translated into English as *The Book of Memories* (University of New Mexico Press). "The surname Rimetka was the result of a combination of auditory expertise and orthographic arbitrariness of some civil servant who attempted to decipher a document written in another language by providing his own interpretation of a surname that he thought a foreigner from Poland should have. ... Like so many other immigrants, the Rimetka family has acquired an intensely national name, a truly indigenous product, much more authentically Argentine than a correctly spelled Spanish surname."

For one hundred years, since the time Argentina pursued a pro-European immigration policy aimed at populating and modernizing the land, there has been an ongoing battle between those forces who wish to retain the discourse of exclusion and those who wish to embrace a discourse of inclusion that mirrors what the nation really is. The events surrounding the AMIA bombing, especially the subsequent investigation, give a good picture of the struggle. First, who planted the bomb? Apparently, international terrorists, under the direction of Iran. But nothing is sure. Four years after the explosion, there is "still no justice," to cite the painful title of a report issued by the American Jewish Committee. Those who destroyed Argentina's main center of Jewish life have not been found; nor, for that matter, have those who perpetrated the bombing of the Israeli embassy in Buenos Aires two years earlier.

Why? Because, most observers believe, powerful local Argentine interests are implicated. Police groups with ties to the military, to neo-Nazis, to right-wing activists—in short, to those elements in Argentine society who have always viewed Jews as an alien, diabolical body, and who have attacked Jewish institutions and denounced "Jewish" professions, such as psychoanalysis. On the other hand, soon after the bomb there was a mass march of tens of thousands of Argentines of diverse backgrounds and creeds to show solidarity with the victims and to repudiate the violence. There were also many expressions of support from the intellectual community, a community that understands all too well the dangers of murder and destruction as forms of political coercion and cultural censorship.

The novelist Tomás Eloy Martinez reminded Argentines on the pages of the daily *Página Doce* that it was not so long before that Argentines disappeared under a brutal military dictatorship, and death squads roamed Buenos Aires. The current evil, Martinez insists, cannot be disconnected from the past. Argentines want to forget what happened then, to pardon the perpetrators, and they want to forget now as well through cowardly calls for isolating Jews. But repressed horrors return with a vengeance, Martinez warns. Let us not fear; let us not forget. A similar cry was sounded by Marjorie Agosin, the Jewish human rights activist and author, now a professor at Wellesley College, who has chronicled terror and memory in Argentina and in her native Chile, still reeling from the blood-chilling Pinochet years. "Silence shrouded us with a great sinister cape," Agosin writes in *Always from Somewhere Else* (Feminist Press). "Fear shaved our souls." Her loving memoir, newly published in English, is dedicated to her immigrant father who left Chile to escape persecution, and to the Jewish and non-Jewish victims of European and Latin American fascism. The AMIA bombing, Agosin says painfully and defiantly, wanted to erase memory, but did not succeed, since many, many people, especially daughters, wives and mothers, refuse to forget.

The most vocal group in the fight to remember and to bring those responsible to justice is Memoria Activa, the significantly-named grassroots organization of private citizens, most but not all Jewish, most but not all relatives of the AMIA explosion's victims. Women are the motor behind

continued on page 45

Renee Zellweger and Christopher Eccleston in "A Price Above Rubies."

Finally Jewish Women Have Sex on the Screen

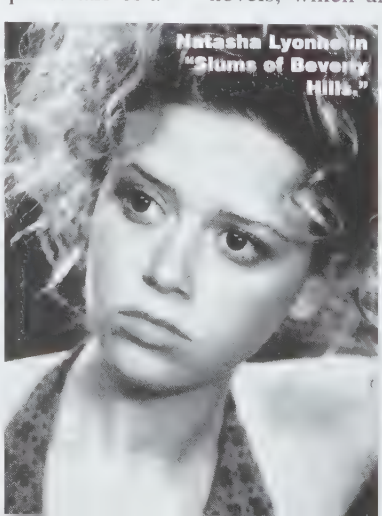
BY AVIVA KEMPNER

In 1998, Jewish celluloid females entered a new dimension. Instead of the traditional cinema image of the overbearing Jewish mother (Woody Allen's "New York Stories") and the spoiled JAP ("Clueless"), Jewish women were portrayed in a refreshing new light on the commercial screen—as powerful, attractive, sexual beings.

Two of these groundbreaking films, Sandra Goldbacher's "The Governess" and Tamara Jenkins' "Slums of Beverly Hills," were written by a new generation of Jewish feminist screenwriters who, for their directorial debuts, purposefully focused on the theme of a Jewish female exploring her sexual identity. And the controversial "A Price Above Rubies," written and directed by Boaz Yakin, showed an assured Orthodox woman achieving independence, then leaving the fold.

British filmmaker Sandra Goldbacher's "The Governess" staked out new cinematic territory with an exquisite tale of a 19th-century Jewish heroine, Sephardic Jew Rosina Da Silva. Minnie Driver plays a free spirit who passes herself off as "Mary Blackchurch" to work as a governess in the home of the Gentile Cavendishes, where she clandestinely celebrates Jewish holidays.

Intrigued by her master's experiments in photography, Silva offers to assist Mr. Cavendish, played by Tom Wilkinson (the uptight foreman in "The Full Monty"). Their intellectual attraction leads to a sexual liaison initiated by the governess. When Mr. Cavendish's guilty conscience halts their sexual relationship, Silva allows a dispirited affair to develop with the Cavendish son. Finally the temptress-governess leaves the intrigues of the Cavendish home and returns to her Jewish world, using her new skills to become a successful portrait photographer. In the film's final scene, Mr. Cavendish visits her studio to pose for a picture, painfully aware that his protégée is the victor.



Natasha Lyonne in "Slums of Beverly Hills."

For those of us who devoured Gothic novels and craved a strong Jewish heroine, Rosina Da Silva is a fantasy come true. In a 1998 interview, Goldbacher claims she always "loved the 19th-century novels with those incredible, passionate heroines," but had never seen any movies about Jews in 19th-century England. "Many unsung Jewish heroines were marginalized back then. I wanted to write something different from the disastrous endings usually found in Gothic novels, which always have the heroine being struck down with consumption or smallpox or just getting married. The governess was a very poignant figure. It was the only way a woman was sent off to see the world." Like Holly Hunter's character in Jane Campion's "The Piano," Goldbacher's feminist character is driven by desire after finding herself in an alien environment.

In "Slums of Beverly Hills," Tamara Jenkins offers a humorous, sexy contemporary coming-of-age tale. Divorced father Murray (Alan Arkin)

moves his three children to cheap housing in Beverly Hills so they can attend school in the 90210 zip code. In contrast to the audaciously wealthy and obnoxious Jewish households we've seen in other features, "Slums" depicts Jews on the lower end of the economic totem pole. In this semi-autobiographic tale, Jenkins envisions her family as "Jewish Joads." In an interview last year, she explained how she "wanted to show the sweetness and weirdness of people who will do anything to maintain their dignity even though they're destitute."

Jenkins concentrates on 15-year-old Vivian Abramowitz (Natasha Lyonne), struggling with her budding sexuality without a mother to guide her. The film follows Vivian coping with her emerging bosom, the advances of a young neighbor, and snide sexual comments from her older brother. Adolescent female angst is most hilarious as Vivian tries on her first bra. When fresh-out-of-rehab niece Rita (Marisa Tomei) comes to live with the family, she addresses Vivian's curiosity about sex by teaching her to use a dildo. Although Vivian is a confused teenager with an overprotective father and a cousin's nutty advice, she ultimately succeeds in defining her own sexual identity.

"Let's face it," Jenkins claims, "it's different for girls growing up. Boys' bodies don't change visibly as they reach teenhood, but its okay for brothers to stare at their sisters' developing chests, it's okay for uncles to say 'Heavens, you've filled out.' Looking back, adolescence is really filled with humiliation."

Adult sexuality is not always simple either, as we see in "A Price Above Rubies." Yakin lovingly presents Sonia (Renee Zellweger), a young Hasidic woman dissatisfied with the sexual relationship in her marriage to the studious Mendel (Glenn Fitzgerald) and with the restrictions of Orthodox life.

Sonia's immoral brother-in-law, Sender (Christopher Eccleston), seduces her, abuses her and betrays her while, ironically, simultaneously offering her access to the outside world as a gem dealer. The scenes of her shrewd business maneuvers (and her affair with a young Hispanic artisan) show how her real liberation comes once she recognizes her own power.

Let us applaud this younger breed of Jewish filmmakers who are presenting on the screen, finally, strong and sexy Jewish women taking control of their lives. ■

Writer and filmmaker Aviva Kempner just completed the documentary "The Life and Times of Hank Greenberg," about the famous Jewish baseball slugger. She also produced "The Partisans of Vilna." She can be reached at CieslaFdn@aol.com.

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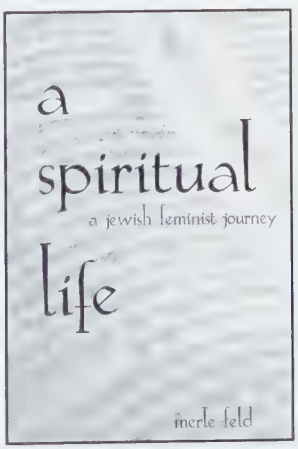

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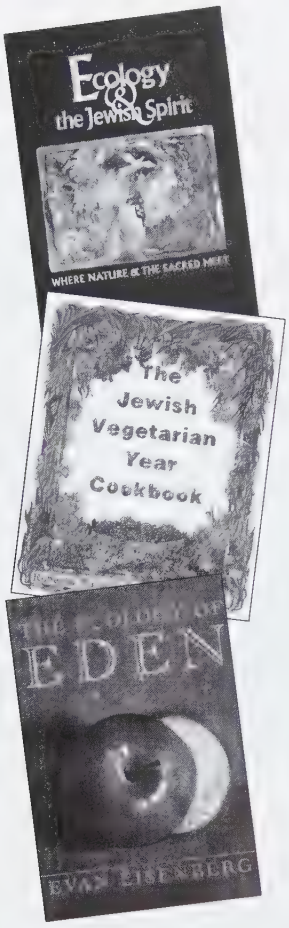

New and Noteworthy

Ecology and the Jewish Spirit: Where Nature and Sacred Meet

edited by Ellen Bernstein, Jewish Lights $23.95

The Jewish Vegetarian Year Cookbook

and

Vegetarian Judaism

by Roberta Kalechofsky, Micah Publications $15.95

The Ecology of Eden

by Evan Eisenberg, Knopf, $30

An internet course on Judaism and vegetarianism? Jewish animal lovers organizing against *paté de foie gras*? In the seemingly endless quest to apply Jewish values to the modern world, a thriving subculture of environmentalists has taken the journey one step further. A series of new books address the relationship of Judaism to environmentalism, ranging from a flat out call for vegetarianism to an argument for heightened awareness of our place in the natural world.

Ecology and the Jewish Spirit: Where Nature and the Sacred Meet, an anthology edited by Ellen Bernstein (founder of Shomrei Adamah—Keepers of the Earth), is the best theoretical work of the bunch. The contributors—rabbis, educators and others—offer a broad range of ideas, from serious biblical analysis (by theologians such as Neil Gillman) to fiction (a wonderful story by Robert Sand) to memoirs of related moments, from childbirth to farming.

Roberta Kalechofsky is publisher and author of two recent books from Micah Publications, *The Jewish Vegetarian Year Cookbook* and *Vegetarian Judaism.* Both books provide well-researched though often preachy arguments on the merits—indeed the necessity—of vegetarianism for Jews. Kalechofsky sees in vegetarianism the potential to unite Jews at all levels of observance. It makes some sense . . . but would Jews survive without brisket and chicken soup? To ease the way, Kalechofsky reconfigures all the major Jewish feasts into vegetarian menus that are, in fact, interesting for all but the die-hard carnivore.

In *The Ecology of Eden,* Evan Eisenberg is less concerned with the Jewish side of his subject. Humanity's exile and constant yearning for a return to Eden, he suggests, provide a metaphor for our relationship to our environment. Using highly symbolic language that may either repel or attract the reader, Eisenberg traces the path of humanity from our biological beginnings to the present, tracking the tumultuous relationship between humans and the rest of nature.

—Sarah Wildman

Rereading the Rabbis: A Woman's Voice

by Judith Hauptman
Westview Press $26, $17 paperback

What does it mean to read the Talmud from a woman's perspective?

Rereading the Rabbis examines ten areas of rabbinic law concerning women—including the marriage ceremony and the biblical prohibitions on sexual intercourse during menstruation—demonstrating their development over time. For those of us who are too often guilty of teaching from choppy photocopied course packets, Hauptman's approach is a crucial corrective.

Describing her approach as "contextual feminism," Hauptman distances herself both from facile apologetics and from a feminism purely critical of the rabbinic sages from the period of the Mishnah and the Talmud (approximately 0 to 500 CE). Hauptman is a renowned scholar and the first woman to receive a Ph.D. in Talmud from the Jewish Theological Seminary. Both her feminism and her commitment to Jewish observance point her toward finding in the rabbis a usable past for contemporary committed Jews.

Hauptman demonstrates that, while the rabbis were hardly feminists, rabbinic law operated as a "benevolent patriarchy" in which women's legal position improved over the centuries. She argues that the direction of the rabbis' movement allows contemporary feminists to see ourselves as among their legitimate successors—and their work as a resource for our own.

Readers hoping for a thoroughly feminist critique of rabbinic law and culture may be disappointed. Hauptman's feminism brings her to "ferret out from these texts the thinking about women, their social status, their relationship to men, and the impact of rabbinic law on them." Hers is not a feminist reading per se, but instead is a historically sensitive, rigorous analysis of women's legal status, through which Hauptman finds rabbinic models of change helpful for contemporary feminists.

Hauptman takes a hands-off approach to *aggadic* (narrative) passages in the Talmud, which contain stories about women. She argues that even when these tales are misogynist—and she implicitly distinguishes misogyny from patriarchy—there is no evidence that this attitude influences the different legal status of men and women. This is a less than satisfying argument in an otherwise dazzling book.

Hauptman's introduction alone is a treat; the depth and unfailingly clear style of her analysis is unprecedented. The greatest achievement of *Rereading the Rabbis* is not its cautiously positive claims, but its thorough, brilliant scholarship. It belongs in the library of every serious Jew.

—Susan Fendrick

Time's Tapestry

by Leta Weiss Marks
Louisiana State University Press, $24.95

When I say New Orleans, I get a knowing shake of the head, or a wistful look. When I grew up there in the '50s and '60s, by the time you were 15, you'd certainly seen a lot: transvestites casually strolling in the French Quarter, strippers prancing on bar tops, jazz funerals, voodoo shops, cemeteries filled with spectacular above-ground crypts, property-threatening hurricanes. It's a city whose most significant cultural activity occurs on a Tuesday, once a year every year, when people dress as their alter egos, move through a suffocating crush of drunk humanity, and beg for trinkets thrown off floats depicting scenes from Greek mythology. In New Orleans, eating is a religion, drinking is a birthright, and gefilte fish is made with trout and redfish. My grandmother Miriam, who belonged to the Orthodox *shul,* always made stuffed crabs when the ladies (all Jewish matrons) came to her house to play cards and have lunch.

Reading *Time's Tapestry* brought back memories of the sensuality of our native city. Leta Weiss Marks, a native New Orleanian, has chronicled four generations of her Jewish family in New Orleans. *Time's Tapestry* is a loving tribute to her Southern roots, but its genesis is the author's quest to understand her father, Leon C. Weiss, who died when she was 21. Much of the material for the book comes from the oral history of Marks' mother and aunt, both in their 90s. Marks gives us family tragedy and triumph, political intrigue, the portrait of New Orleans itself, as told from the perspective of strong women.

We learn that her American roots predate the Civil War with the arrival of Abel Dreyfous in New York from Alsace, France. Hoping to improve his prospects, Abel moved his family to New Orleans around 1839. The love affair of the author's parents, Caroline and Leon, is the fulcrum of the story. The prominent and prosperous Dreyfous family, Reform Jews proud of their assimilation, opposed the marriage. The Weisses were of Polish and French descent and poor, and to Caroline's parents they were too "ethnic." During a summer where Caroline's parents forced their separation, their love grew stronger, and the Dreyfouses finally accepted Leon as their son-in-law in a Reform ceremony in 1927.

Leon Marks was a talented and ambitious architect whose winning personality led his firm, Weiss, Dreyfous, and Sieferth, to great success. During the late '20s and '30s, Louisiana was governed by the infamous Huey Long, about whom no one held a neutral view. Those who supported his politics often did so with financial gain in

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Everyone in New Orleans has some personal experience that mirrors the strangeness of the city.

mind; others called him a dictator.

Leon procured several important architectural commissions from Governor Long: a new governor's mansion in Baton Rouge, a new capital building, a multimillion-dollar construction program providing new dorms, classrooms, a stadium, and library for LSU. More and more public contracts came to the firm, and the 1930s saw the building of several New Orleans landmarks. Long was assassinated in 1935, and in 1939 a grand jury investigating Louisiana corruption charged the Weiss firm with embezzling money and construction materials for buildings at LSU.

Marks tells us that Leon, so earnest and naive, had a gullible trust in what turned out to be a corrupt system. He was convicted of mail fraud and sentenced to two years in federal prison. Although Leon returned to his firm, his incarceration had damaged his spirit. Three months before the author's wedding her father died; it wasn't until she was an adult that the stories of Marks' mother and aunt, and the newspaper articles of the time, began revealing the truth of her family's past.

Important to *Time's Tapestry* is the portrait created of Jewish life and culture in New Orleans. Social clubs like the Yacht Club and Mardi Gras balls were restricted, but Jews created their own clubs and found a way to adapt to and embrace New Orleans culture on their own terms. (The author's aunt, for example, respected teacher and psychologist Ruth Dreyfous, led a small group of substitute teachers to fill in when regular teachers went on strike to protest desegregation.)

A disturbing quality of many contemporary memoirs is a raw sensationalism that takes the reader into uncomfortable private territory. Though it's about a family from one of the most sensual and mysterious cities in the world, this book doesn't seem raw *enough*. Everyone in New Orleans has some personal experience that mirrors the strangeness of the city. My own maternal grandmother was a witness to patricide when she was a young girl. Her mother, my great-grandmother, loved to gamble. Her daughter, affectionately known as The Madam, found nothing so enjoyable as playing at the blackjack tables until 5 am. So I would have liked from this interesting tale even more color and candor.

—Jan Aronson

Sarah Wildman is a freelance writer living in Washington, D.C.

Rabbi Susan Fendrick is associate director of Brown-RISD Hillel, vice-chair of the National Havurah Committee, and a writer, teacher and bibliodramatist.

Jan Aronson is an artist in New York City.

Caryn Aviv, a doctoral candidate in sociology at Loyola University Chicago, is writing her dissertation on gender, Zionism, and American aliyah. *She lives in Jerusalem.*

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reyf

film by Alisa Lebow and Cynthia Madansky
istributed by Women Make Movies

have to admit, I was nervous to be sitting
n a theater, waiting for the screening of a
ew Jewish lesbian film, with my parents,
o less.

The film in question is "Treyf," by Alisa
ebow and Cynthia Madansky, shown as
art of the OutFest Gay and Lesbian Film
estival in Los Angeles and scheduled to
remiere on the Sundance cable channel in
lay. A personal narrative and political cri-
ique of Jewish identity in the United States
nd Israel, "Treyf" maps the challenges of
traddling disparate communities.

The film opens as Lebow and
Madansky, a couple living in New York,
hop for Passover items. As they scan the
helves for gefilte fish, matzo meal, and
hose awful jellied candies in rainbow col-
rs, they recount how they met at a *seder.*
Who knew it was possible to fall in love at
irst sight over Manischevitz wine and a
owl of *charoset?* Madansky reveals that
she immediately started obsessing over
whether they had *too* much in common.

In spite of their relationship's auspicious
(if neurotic) beginning, they turn out to have
grown up in different circumstances. Lebow
was raised on Long Island, in the middle-
class ghettoes of Hadassah meetings, Israel
Day parades and temple summer camps.
Madansky's parents raised her in an
Orthodox framework that she rejected as a
young adult. For several years, Madansky
lived in Israel with a partner in a *haredi*
neighborhood, while Lebow remembers
Israel through the prism of childhood visits
and Zionist youth programs. Both Lebow
and Madansky recount how their emerging
sexuality and yearning for gender equality
clashed with their membership in Jewish
communities, prompting deep soul-search-
ing and existential angst. Needless to say, I
could relate. And judging from the nodding
heads and sighs in the audience, many oth-
ers did as well.

For the filmmakers, *treyf* is a metaphor
for belonging while standing on the mar-
gins. They begin with a hilarious 1960s
filmstrip about *kashrut*: the definition of
treyf includes a reference to lesbians and
unpopular political opinion (this got a rol-
licking belly laugh from the audience). The
filmmakers transform their "treyfness"—as
feminist, leftist lesbians—into a source of

WOMEN MAKE MOVIES

strength by remembering the Jewish radi-
cal past through lesbian eyes. Walking
through the tenement blocks of the Lower
East Side, they name Rose Schneiderman
and Lillian Wald as their activist precur-
sors. They also gather together friends,
acquaintances, activists, intellectuals and
Orthodox dissidents to explore the multiple
meanings of Jewish lesbian identity in
America today.

The filmmakers also investigate tensions
in contemporary Israel. They make connec-
tions between patriarchal religious practices
and the unjust consequences of unbridled
nationalism.

In the private space of their home, the
filmmakers try to honor their love for each
other, for their communities, and for other
Jewish lesbian women's struggles to be
whole. As I struggle with my own discom-
fort of being out in my family's Jewish com-
munity, I wanted to learn more about the
filmmakers' processes of coming out, of
how they negotiate the borders between
their parents' worlds and the secular, activist
world they have joined as adults.

Despite this gap in their narrative, I
loved this film. I was so nourished that
I wanted to invite Lebow and Madansky for
coffee and a schmooze. When my parents
asked me what I thought of the film, I told
them it was the first time I had seen so many
parts of my own story on screen. They said
they had never realized how difficult (but
rewarding) it can be to embrace being "out"
as a Jew and a lesbian. Their comment
spoke volumes about the consciousness-
raising that needs to be done. I, for one, am
deeply grateful to the filmmakers for mak-
ing their *"treyf"* lives visible.

—Caryn Aviv

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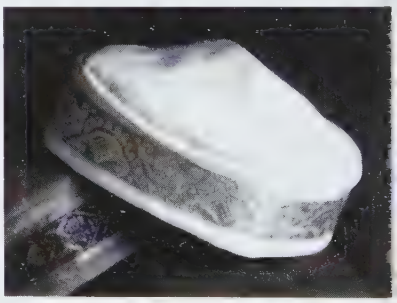

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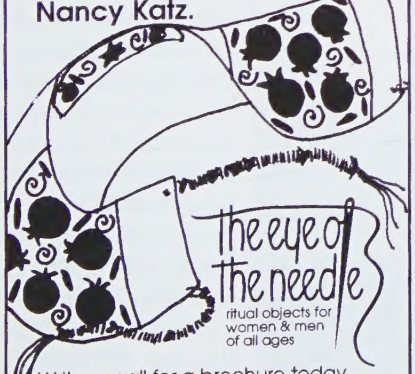

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Post Pinochet

continued from page 37

Memoria Activa, so much so that they have been called *"las madres de la calle Pasteur,"* the mothers of Pasteur Street, in analogy with the now-legendary Madres de la Plaza de Mayo, the mothers of the disappeared who during the seventies dictatorship weekly circled Buenos Aires' main square clamoring for information about their children, clamoring for justice.

Led by Norma Lew (president), Diana Malamud (secretary), and Laura Ginsberg (treasurer), three mothers and wives who lost children and husbands in the AMIA catastrophe, Memoria Activa refuses to play ball with the government, unlike Argentine Jewry's official representatives. It dismisses the authorities' so-called investigation as a sham that diverts attention from local culprits by concentrating on the supposed Iranian connection. Every Monday since the bombing, Memoria Activa members and sympathizers gather at another Buenos Aires Square, across from the Supreme Court, under the banner of the command from Deuteronomy, *tzedek, tzedek tirdof,* justice, justice you shall pursue.

Memoria Activa has garnered considerable media attention and significant moral weight. The list of those who have stood with Memoria Activa on so many Mondays, and who have spoken at vigils, reads like a who's who of democratically-minded Argentina. Here is what Laura Bonaparte of the Madres de la Plaza de Mayo said on Monday October 20, 1997: "Yesterday was Mother's Day. And this society is trying to put together the broken body of its mother institution. And we have to do this together. Because what happened happened in each and every one of our homes. All of us discovered that state terrorism was alive and well . . . the state whose silence makes it complicit. The AMIA didn't abandon us, it was assassinated. Those responsible for the act and for the silence are right here. The legacy of the crime will be perpetuated until such time as the testimony of truth becomes part of the search for justice."

The conflict between Memoria Activa, the Jewish establishment, and the Menem government became public at the 1997 ceremony marking the third anniversary of the bombing, when the crowd of 30,000 gave a rousing ovation to the tough speech delivered by Memoria Activa's Laura Ginsberg, and, in the presence of several government ministers, repeatedly interrupted Ruben Beraja, the president of the DAIA, Argentine Jewry's representative agency. After the fiasco, Beraja was summarily summoned by the Minister of the Interior, Carlos Corach (who, incidentally is Jewish) to explain the embarrassing protest.

It is clear, then, that the explosion at the AMIA raises serious questions about pluralism in Argentina as it attempts to enter the late twentieth century by overcoming outmoded legacies. Argentine cultural critic Beatriz Sarlo puts it bluntly: Can we find an idea of nation that doesn't derive from fundamentalism or dictatorship? Will Argentina be a space of oneness—one religion, one language, one color? Or will it be a kaleidoscopic space of multiplicity, where women no longer need to grieve over their shattered dead? ■

Edna Aizenberg, Professor and Chair of Hispanic Studies at Marymount Manhattan College, is an activist for Jewish rights in Latin America. She is the author of books and essays on Jewish, Latino and women's issues, including The Aleph Weaver: Bible, Kabbalah and Judaism in Borges.

Gift of Literacy

Orthodox women in the pulpit! On May 1,1999, in Orthodox *shuls* around the world a woman will speak on shabbat morning, give a *shiur* (lesson) between *minha* and *ma'ariv* or—in a *shul* uncomfortable with women in these roles—a woman will give a *shiur* for women only, or the rabbi will address the entire congregation on a "women's topic." "*Shabbat T'lamdeini* (Teach Me): Women, Learning, Leadership & Community" is a program sponsored by the Jewish Orthodox Feminist Alliance. Speak to your rabbi and contact *JOFA, 459 Columbus Ave., New York, NY 10024; (888)550-5632.*

Rosh Chodesh Guide by Rabbi Lenore Boehm tells how to organize a group and

gives program ideas for each of the Jewish lunar months. $18.75 from *Women of Reform Judaism, 633 Third Ave., New York, NY 10017; (212)650-4060; fax (212)650-4059; eroshevs@uahc.org*

Hold a poetry slam to mark the 150th birthday of poet Emma Lazarus. Discover activists like Hannah Greenebaum Solomon, founder of National Council of Jewish Women. Organize a "mock court" in the spirit of reformer Judge Justine Wise Polier. These three are the "women of valor" in this year's posters for women's history month, with resource guide. Free to schools. *Jewish Women's Archive, 68 Harvard St., Brookine, MA 02445; (617)232-2258; fax (617)975-0109; lmirchin@aol.com; www.jwa.org*

Now that we have witnessed and learned from our parents and history, what do we do? The 2G-Legacy is an online discussion group for children and grandchildren of Jewish Holocaust survivors. Moderator Reyzl Kalifowicz-Waletzky notes that this is not an online therapy group. Applications available from web page at *www.flash.net/~reyzl/2g-application.html* or send the message: "subscribe 2G-legacy your-first-name-your-last-name" to *listproc@shamash.org*

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Retelling the Exodus Story

A Ma'yan Guide to Planning Communal Women's Seders was created in response to many requests from the thousands of women who have attended this most popular program of the catalyst organization since their first feminist seder held in 1994. A growing bibliography is included. Free from *Ma'yan, the Jewish Women's Project of the JCC on the Upper West Side, 15 W. 65th St., New York, NY 10023; (212) 580-0099; fax (212)580-9498; mayanjcc@aol.com; http://mayan.org*

The Story of Moses/ Adoption Haggadah, written by Michele Kriegman for a group of adoptive parents, birth parents and adult and child adoptees, draws on the relationship of Moses and his adoptive Egyptian mother who chose to join his Hebrew birth family when the children of Israel crossed the Red Sea. It uses the *afikomen* ritual as a metaphor for a hidden gift each individual is seeking. [See Lilith Summer 1998]. $12 from *Michele Kriegman, 30 Crestwood Rd., Morristown, NJ 07960*

The New American Haggadah includes Jewish women and girls in ritual and leadership roles as well as texts focused on the accomplishments of women such as Yocheved and Miriam.

Home

"Home" and "enforced psychic tourism" in the lives or texts of Jewish/ American women writers is the subject of a forthcoming book. Want to be part of it? Send up to 20 pages exploring the physical, psychological, emotional, and spiritual "homes" Jewish women writers have sought or created, in the realization of their marginalized position within Judaism by April 15 to *Dr. Phillipa Kafka, 422 Meeker St., South Orange, NJ 07079; (973)761-7349; fax (973)761-7374.*

Sitting Shiva with the Rogarshevskys—a new permanent exhibit—recreates a week in 1918 when an Orthodox family of Jewish immigrants from Lithuania is mourning a death from tuberculosis. Learn about the traditional mourning meal of eggs, lentils, rolls and other round foods representing the circle of life, and the significance of the *landsmanshaftn*—associations of immigrants from the same hometown. The exhibit touches on the practices of Orthodox Jews, the history of American medicine and funerary practices, women in the workforce, labor history, and intergroup relations. *Lower East Side Tenement Museum, 90 Orchard St., New York, NY 10002; (212)431-0233; fax (212)431-0402.*

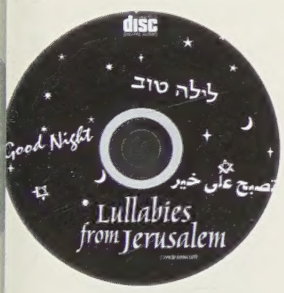
Fannie Rogarshevsky on the roof of 97 Orchard Street, c. 1915.

Miriam's Cup appears in the *Dayenu* section. This retelling by Mordecai M. Kaplan, Eugene Kohn and Ira Eisenstein is newly edited by Gila Gevirtz. $9.95 from *Behrman House, 235 Watchung Ave., West Orange, NJ 07052; (973)669-0447.*

Hagadah: A Celebration of Freedom for all women by poet Martha Shelley with Hebrew translations by Ilana Brody was originally created for the Feminist Eclectic Martial Arts School in Minneapolis. $9.95 from *Aunt Lute Books, P.O. Box 410687 San Francisco, CA 94141; www.auntlute.com*

Parenting

Lullabies from Jerusalem, a CD, offers 26 songs mothers and fathers sing to get their children to sleep in Hebrew,



Arabic, English, Yiddish, Ladino, Russian, Armenian and Amharic. Compiled by Chana Yaffe with lyrics translated into English in accompanying booklet. $15.98 plus shipping. *Tara Publications, 8 Music Fair Rd. #I, Owings Mills, MD 21117; (800)827-2400; www.jewishmusic.com*

Afikomen and Easter Eggs: Spring in the Interfaith Family highlights the commonality of two different religious celebrations. It includes craft ideas for kids. Free. *Dovetail Institute for Interfaith Family Resources, P.O. Box 1110, Carlisle, PA 17013-6110; (800)530-1596; fax (717)243-9123; IFaithR@aol.com.*

Pregnancy and Parental Leave: An Employment Guide is a legal resource kit giving an overview of how the law affects workers so they can make informed decisions to guard against discrimination. (Another resource, Domestic Violence and Child Custody, is accessible through their website.) $5.00 from *NOW-LDEF, 99 Hudson St., New York, NY 10013-2871; www.nowldef.org/html/pub/lrkhome.htm*

Healing

Speedy mammography and biopsy results in Israel. Both can be completed in one day at the new comprehensive Hala Clinic (*hala*, also an acronym, means "forward" in Hebrew). *The Rachel Nash Jerusalem Comprehensive Breast Clinic, Beit Ofer, 5 Nachum Heftzadi St., 95484 Jerusalem, Israel; (972)659-5533.*

The Shira Ruskay Jewish Hospice Information Services is named in memory of the inspiring lawyer and director of social work for the hospice of NY's Visiting Nurses Services. It offers free confidential information, consultation and referral for Jewish families with a terminally ill member. *Harriet Feiner, Jewish Board of Family and Children's Services, (212)664-1632.*

Travel

Jewish Women's Tours of Berlin organized by Iris Weiss include biographical stories and sites of: Recha Freier, founder of the Youth Aliyah Movement; Regina Jonas, the first woman rabbi; writers Gertrud Kolmar, Else Ury. Contact *Iris Weiss, Somoastr. 7, 13353 Berlin; (49)30-453-5304; iris.weiss@berlin.snafu.de; http://www.hagalil.com/brd/berlin/tourism.htm*

A new Jewish museum recently opened in the Marais district in Paris, with an installation by Sophie Calle, "The Eruv of Jerusalem." Funded by the municipality and the Ministry of Culture.

Musee d'art et d'histoire du Judaisme, Hotel de Saint-Aignan, 71 rue du Temple, 75003 Paris, France ; (33)1-53-01-86-53; fax (33)1-42-72-97-47; info@mahj.org

To find an egalitarian minyan or a rosh hodesh group in Berlin contact: *Rivka Jaussi,Obentrautstrasse 46, D-10963 Berlin, Germany; (49)30-216 8956.*

Take a week of joyful Jewish learning, prayer and community living with 200-300 Jews of all backgrounds from across the USA. The annual National Havurah Conference meets August 2-8 at Hofstra University on Long Island. *NHC, 7135 Germantown Ave, Philadelphia, PA 19119; (215)248-1335; 73073.601@compuserve.com*

Lishma, an Egalitarian Summer Yeshiva Program for Jewish men and women ages 18-25, takes its name from the Hebrew for Torah studied for its own sake. June 30-Aug. 10. *Daniel Greyber, Lishma, Camp Ramah in California, 15600 Mulholland Drive, Bel Air, CA 90077-1599; (888)-CAMP RAMAH; fax (310)472-3810; lishma@ramah.org; www.lishma.org*

Strong Women

Help Israeli women candidates be elected to the Knesset this May. A coalition of women's organizations has established a fund that encourages Israeli voters across the political spectrum to vote for women to have a more representative Knesset. *Committee for the Advancement of Women in Politics in Israel, c/o WIZO, P.O.B.33159., 61331 Tel Aviv, Israel; (972)3-682-3898; fax (972)3-692-3796.*

Letty Cottin Pogrebin and Hannah Safran are the guests of honor at the annual luncheon on May 11, in New York, of an organization that supports feminist causes in Israel: *US/Israel Women to Women, 275 Seventh Ave., 8th fl., New York, NY 10001; (212)206-8057; usisrw2w@aol.com*

The Annotated Alice is a documentary portrait of the founding chairwoman of the Israel Women's Network,

now rector of the Schechter Institute in Jerusalem. Produced and directed by Paula Weiman-Kelman, the 51-minute video weaves together home movies, archival footage and Alice Shalvi telling her own story. *National Center for Jewish Film, Brandeis University, Lown 102, MS 053, Waltham MA 02454; (781)899-7044; fax (781)736-2070; www.brandeis.edu/jewish-film./index html*

—compiled by Naomi Danis

Why is this chair different from all other chairs?

by Annie Wigman

A classic scene.

The table set for family, neighbors and friends to share a festive feast. Rosh Hashanah, Seder night, Grandpa's 80th birthday.... Hosts fret over the food. Children anticipate their spot in the limelight (and presents!). You comb your hair, fix your lipstick—sigh a little, then set off to join them.

The guests arrive. A quick scan of the room shows nine adults—but only eight dining room chairs. Folding chairs drafted in for the children—and ...

You're female and (still) single. Next to the hostess (near the door to the kitchen) you see one more folding chair. You're not the youngest adult present but the singular single woman. You *know* the folding chair's to be your chair.

Time to eat. *Bete'avon, buon apetito*. The hostess will need help. Who will be helper? Who will help serve, be the last to get served? Who will help clear the table? My, you're guessing quick tonight, girls!

So, you think you're a grown-up?

Achieved much in your life. Good job, nice home. You've made it. But *oy vey!* are you wide of the mark! Times may have changed, but traditional attitudes trail well behind. Success and maturity still require marriage and motherhood. Singlehood equals servitude—and folding chairs like the children.

Insecure? Oversensitive? Paranoid? Obsessed with status? Possibly. Probably. But the reality breeds the insecurity. Single women with inquiring, outreaching minds don't fit the ideals of traditional Jewish society. We're like fish out of water. We're not sure how to breathe. But the water's so confining we won't go back in, as we know it will drown us.

How do we contribute without having to conform? How do we rejoice in our Jewishness without jeopardizing out freedom? And why must we wait to be married before we get the dining room chair! ■

Annie Wigman, who lives in London, is editor of Across the Spectrum for the Jewish Women's Network, a British organization.